THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD, REIMAGINED

CARLOW UNIVERSITY PRESS

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University Press

The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined

Edited by Lesley A. Wolff

With essays by
Marlene L. Daut
Edouard Duval-Carrié
James López
Jerry Philogene
Claire Tancons
Lesley A. Wolff

Featuring work by
Dudley Alexis
Chesley Antoinette
José Bedia
Edouard Duval-Carrié
Scherezade García
José García Cordero
Simryn Gill
Leah Gordon
Roberto Juarez
Maggie Steber
William Vázquez

Designed by
Ana C. Alvarado Díaz
with assets from
Alison Pirl

Cover image
Maggie Steber
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In memory of scholar J. Michael Dash (1948-2019), who so generously dedicated his time and expertise to this project in the months before his passing. His influence endures.

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Director's Foreword

The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined invites us into the layered histories, cultural imaginaries, and revolutionary spirit of Haiti as seen through the lens of Alejo Carpentier's seminal novel and the visionary works of contemporary artists from the Caribbean and its diaspora. The Carlow University Art Gallery serves as a platform for exploring the intersections of art, history, and ethical inquiry. Spaces where the past reverberates in the present and where narratives, often marginalized or silenced, find new forms of expression. This exhibition, with its focus on the Haitian Revolution's enduring impact, exemplifies our commitment to examining art's role in confronting imperial legacies, decolonizing historical narratives, and fostering dialogue about sovereignty and liberation in ways that animate, honor and embody humanity.

Curated with profound insight by Dr. Lesley A. Wolff, *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* navigates the complex terrain of lo real maravilloso, the marvelous real, through a spectrum of artistic practices encompassing painting, sculpture, photography, film, and print. The works presented challenge us to reconsider the ways we understand revolution as not a discrete historical event but as an ongoing process of resistance and reimagining. Through these powerful visual narratives, we witness the resilience of cultural memory and the potency of artistic expression to evoke histories that are personal and political, local and global.

I When this exhibition was first realized in Pittsburgh in 2023-2024, I served in multiple roles at Carlow University: Chair of the Department of Art, Communication, and English; Program Director of Art and Design; Director and Curator of the Carlow University Art Gallery; and Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art History and Curatorial Studies. The exhibition's interdisciplinary approach resonated deeply with our departmental vision at that time. The convergence of critical essays, historical analysis, and contemporary artworks within this catalogue mirrors the spirit of our academic programs—encouraging a pedagogy that values multiplicity, embraces complexity, and advocates for the increased valuation of often-invisibilized narratives. Through storytelling and amplifying voices that probe the intersections of race, gender, and power, this project aligns with our mission to cultivate spaces for learning that are expansive, reflective, and transformative.

The themes explored in this exhibition (potential history, visual sovereignty, and the politics of memory) are timely and urgent. The Haitian Revolution, as the first successful uprising of enslaved people in the Americas, stands as a monument and testimony to the fight for freedom against overwhelming forces of oppression. Yet, as the works in this exhibition powerfully attest, the legacies of this revolution continue to unfold in the present. In this way, the exhibition is not just a commemoration of history but a provocation to reconsider how histories are told, whose stories are told and retold, and what possibilities might arise when we reimagine the past through the lens of the present.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Lesley A. Wolff for her curatorial vision, scholarly contributions, labor, and commitment to this project, these ideas and to the artists who joined her in this beautiful project. I want to thank the remarkable artists whose works resonate with such urgency and clarity, and to the essayists who offer vital perspectives that deepen our understanding of this revolutionary legacy. I am also grateful to the Arts, Equity & Education Fund for their vital support of this exhibition, to Carlow University Press for bringing this publication to fruition, and to the staff, students, and colleagues whose collaborative spirit made this project possible. I also want to honor the work of student graphic designer and art educator, Alison Pirl, now a Carlow Alumna in conceptualizing, visualizing, and translating the exhibition's potent imagery and complex ideas. I also want to thank Ana Alvarado for her beautiful work designing and laying out this publication.

I invite you to linger in the complexities of this volume, to embrace the questions posed by the artists and writers alike, and to consider the ways in which history, art, and activism intersect to illuminate paths forward. *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* is, at its core, an exploration of how we might envision new worlds, worlds rooted in sovereignty, collective memory, and repair. It is our hope that this catalogue serves as a document to the power of art to provoke, to heal, and to reimagine what is possible.

Amy Bowman-McElhone, PhD

Associate Professor of Contemporary Art History and Curatorial Studies
Director and Curator, Carlow University Art Gallery

Chair, Department of Art, Communication & English (2023-2025)
Program Director, Art & Design (2020-2024)

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Art Gallery

Roberto Juarez

French Passage, 2019
Mixed media on canvas
© 2024 Roberto Juarez

Introduction

A Map of the Island of St. Domingo. In Marcus Rainsford, *An historical account of the black empire of Hayti* ... [London] : Albion Press printed: published by James Cundee, Ivy-Lane, Paternoster-Row; and sold by C. Chapple, Pall Mall, 1805.

J. Barlow sculp.

by Jas Cundee, Ivy Lane, Paternoster Row.

Abbreviated Timeline of

Haitian Revolutionary Events

1791

A secret Vodou ceremony takes place near Cap Haïtien, bringing together enslaved and marooned communities who would ultimately sound the conch shell in a cry of rebellion; **this period became known as the formal start of the Haitian Revolution.**

1804

Military leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines declares independence for the nation of Haiti from France; Haiti becomes the first nation in the Western hemisphere to **permanently abolish slavery.**

1811

After the assassination of Dessalines in 1806, former military leader **Henri Christophe claims sovereignty** over the northern half of the nation, eventually declaring himself King Henry I of Haïti.

1820

King Henry I commits suicide, ushering in the **reunification of the northern and southern territories** of the first Republic of Haiti, ruled by revolutionary leader Jean-Pierre Boyer.

1825

The nation of France demands that the newly formed Republic of Haiti pay damages for having liberated the world's most profitable colony, Saint Domingue; the indemnity, the equivalent of an astonishing (US)$21 billion in today's currency, tethers the young nation to continued economic and political injustices on the global stage.

The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined An Introduction

Lesley A. Wolff

The Kingdom of This World
"That afternoon, the slaves returned to their plantations laughing all the way. Makandal had kept his word. Remaining in the Kingdom of This World, Once more the whites had been outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore." (46)

Edouard Duval-Carrié
The Kingdom of This World, 2019
Artist book, limited edition of 10 boxed sets of 14 serigraphs
Artist Proof Studio, Johannesburg, South Africa
© 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

This exhibition showcases works in painting, print, photography, film, and sculpture, by eleven contemporary artists, each of whom respond to writer Alejo Carpentier's magical realist tale *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). The book takes an imaginative dive into the volatile epoch of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), when an extraordinary uprising, led by enslaved and freed people of color, transformed the French colonial territory of Saint Domingue into the liberated nation of Haiti. As the first successful revolt by enslaved laborers and the first free Black nation in the Americas, the Haitian Revolution's impact was felt across the imperial globe—invigorating emancipatory fights while inciting a brutal and persistent backlash—with effects that ripple across the Caribbean and its diaspora to this day.

The renowned artists in this exhibition present work that responds to Carpentier's stylized retelling of Haiti's profound history through the literary genre known as *lo real maravilloso* [the marvelous real]. In the book's prologue, written in 1948, Carpentier famously asks, "For what is the history of the Americas, if not a chronicle of the marvelous in the real?" To Carpentier, the shared heritage of this hemisphere is marvelous, if uneasy. The marvelous recalls the extraordinary traumas inflicted on the subjugated people of Saint Domingue and across the colonial territories, as well as the awe-inspiring efforts required to persist amid and strive to overcome such injustices, inequities, and silences. In the 80 years since its publication, Carpentier's interpretation of events has been debated, derided, and fêted; indeed, the Swiss-born Cuban émigré's prose evokes the fraught voice and politics of his circumstance as a foreign, white writer reflecting on Black liberatory history during Surrealism's apogee in the Caribbean. Yet, as the artworks in this exhibition attest, this book persists today in the Caribbean imagination as a touchstone, however fraught, that reflects and refracts the historical and ongoing fight for sovereignty that imperial forces and official records have systemically silenced.[1] In this way, *The Kingdom of This World*, for all its flawed and gratuitous depictions of gendered and racialized violence, stands as a significant literary prism through which we can begin to unravel the layered visual regimes of the Haitian Revolution and its global Caribbean legacy.

In many ways, *The Kingdom of This World* provokes questions aligned with scholar Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's writings on the notion of *potential history*. Azoulay defines potential history as "a form of being with others, both living and dead, across time, against the separation of the past from the present, colonized peoples from their worlds and possessions, and history from politics."[2] For Azoulay, potential history opens pathways to "unlearn" the singular, official, and overdetermined narratives of the state and move toward the multivocal realities that have been hidden from view, but that have nonetheless been integral sites of community building and cultural inheritance for marginalized groups. Potential history means to speculate about worlds otherwise, to unlearn the linear narratives of the Western

[1] See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

[2] Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso Books, 2019), 43.

historical canon and to make space for those people, places, and events that have been stifled across the centuries. This twenty-first century charge thus builds upon Carpentier's desire, one century earlier, to approach the monumental, if suppressed, history of the Haitian Revolution through the framework of the *marvelous*—an outsized expression of how to envision being otherwise—a presence capable of revealing and rupturing oppressive epistemes by inviting deeper consideration of how we embody and visualize potential in *the kingdom of this world.*

This exhibition likewise takes up Azoulay's charge by *reimagining* Haiti's revolutionary history through the speculative lens of Afro-Caribbean mythology and spirituality as it was embodied by revolutionary actors. By unsettling the relationship between history and mythology, these artists profoundly shift our perception of the Caribbean from passive, tropical paradise to dynamic nexus of unbounded revolutionary potential. Like *The Kingdom of This World*, the works in this exhibition hinge on the recognition of *revolution* as a radical, if cyclical, turning over of the world order, facilitated in part by the *lwa*, or Vodou dieties. These artworks, produced by an international cohort of artists, attest to the historical and ongoing impact of the singular event of the Haitian Revolution as a process entangled with broader Caribbean and global histories of diaspora, enslavement, migration, liberation, spirituality, and sovereignty. In the context of this exhibition, then, revolution is not only exemplified by the war that birthed the nation of Haiti, but also through the ongoing process of reassessing and reimagining that inheritance in the present. In short, revolutions never fully break from their pasts; they persistently flow into the here and now, carrying ancestors and phantoms over the threshold into the dawn of a new age.

The artists contributing to this exhibition—including Dudley Alexis, Chesley Antoinette, José Bedia, Edouard Duval-Carrié, Scherezade García, José García Cordero, Simryn Gill, Leah Gordon, Roberto Juarez, Maggie Steber, and William Vázquez—produce works that consider how marvelous reimaginings can bridge ancestral knowledge with contemporary experience. In so doing, they manifest a

vision of Haitian and Afro-Caribbean history and heritage that refutes Eurocentric narratives, revealing revolution as not a cycle of histories we are doomed to repeat, but rather a reframing of histories through centuries of intergenerational knowledge harnessed to cultivate future possibilities. Though varied in media and style, these artists share in a desire to foreground Afro-Caribbean history as the beating heart of modern visuality, illuminating Haiti's extraordinary role as a liberatory model and a nation forged out of unthinkable circumstances. Likewise, the essays that follow in this catalog add further layers of meaning, interpretation, and mediation to the rich artworks they discuss. Through an interdisciplinary group of writers, we see how the Haitian Revolution has been imbricated in cultural memory through Haitian history, Cuban literature, Caribbean modernist text and image, and contemporary curatorial practice. The diverse voices represented on the following pages underscore the multifaceted epistemes affected by the Revolution and its ripples across time and space.

Following this introduction, brief texts about Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of This World* provide initial touchstones for the motifs, personal narratives, and historical layers that inform this exhibition. The catalog then pivots to more formal essays that invite deeper discussion of the Haitian and Caribbean diasporic history and aesthetics undergirding this exhibition. Historian Marlene Daut offers a richly intimate and rigorously researched glimpse into the early nineteenth-century triumphs and follies of King Henri Christophe I, revolutionary leader-cum-monarch who ruled over the northern Kingdom of Haiti until his untimely death by suicide. Daut's political-historical framing of Christophe's final days dovetails with Carpentier's interpretation of the king's reign in *The Kingdom of This World* as well as in the work of contemporary artists, such as Edouard Duval-Carrié, who vivify Christophe and his kingdom. Art and cultural historian Jerry Philogene builds upon Daut's text, taking us further forward in history with a poetic and insightful examination of Afro-Caribbean imagination and theories of freedom in the twentieth century—epistemes that overlap with the period in which Carpentier penned *The Kingdom of This World.* Philogene applies mid-twentieth century

francophone Caribbean movements, such as Négritude and Surrealism, to the contemporary paintings of artist Scherezade García, whose gestural compositions invite new readings of nation and liberty in the Greater Antilles, particularly in the transnational context of Hispaniola/Quisqueya.

Literary scholar James López likewise situates his discussion within the twentieth century and its contemporary reimaginings through a comparative analysis. He examines Alejo Carpentier's approach to modernism and *lo real maravilloso* in relation to the contemporary visual practice of Cuban-born artist José Bedia, who produced a series of monumental ink on paper works for this exhibition. Focused on the Cuban context and its transnational underpinnings, López offers an incisive reading of *The Kingdom of This World*, showing the myriad ways in which Bedia, though inspired by Carpentier's words, ultimately forges a visual practice all his own, one that eschews the author's modernist proclivities.

The final essay by curator Claire Tancons offers a fluid, poetic discussion of visual sovereignty and contemporary art in and of the Caribbean. Using Leah Gordon's film and photographic work from this exhibition as a catalyst, Tancons deftly aligns historical Haitian events with contemporary politics to question the relationship between visuality, liberation, and "ungovernance" in the context of Haiti and the francophone Caribbean writ large. Tancons brings us full circle, thinking through King Henri Christophe's monumental site of the Citadelle Laferrière—an important backdrop in Carpentier's text and in multiple works from this exhibition—as emblematic of colonial empire and its paradoxical unfurlings across the centuries. In the final pages of her essay, Tancons touches on various artists and works from this exhibition, suggesting that memory, myth, and imagination can be powerful tools in the context of ungovernance and in the fight for sovereignty.

Together, these artists and essayists grapple with what it means to envision the marvelous in our present-day moment, a moment rife with reckonings of racial and civic (in)justice in which we seek to pave new and interconnected paths toward liberation and belonging.

Roberto Juarez
Illustration from *The Kingdom of This World* by Alejo Carpentier
Printed by Peter Pettengill and Wingate Studio, Published by Limited Editions Club, 1987
Etching on paper
© 2024 Roberto Juarez

Alejo Carpentier's Kingdom of This World

Lesley A. Wolff

Alejo Carpentier y Valmont (b. Lausanne, Switzerland, December 26, 1904 - d. Paris, France, April 24, 1980) was a Cuban scholar, novelist, playwright, critic, essayist, and musicologist whose work proved formative to twentieth-century literature throughout the Americas. Most renowned among all his endeavors has been the fictionalized tale T*he Kingdom of This World* (first published as *El reino de este mundo* in 1949; first English-language edition published in 1957) about the profound political and social impacts of the Haitian Revolution.

As an émigré born in Switzerland and raised in Cuba, who later found refuge in places such as France and Venezuela, Carpentier's itinerant life led him to interrogate the role of liberty, belonging, and citizenship in art and politics. Whether fiction, journalism, or ethnography, Carpentier's written work tackles subjects of displacement, cultural fusion, exile, and redemption, often through the lens of Caribbean history and the lessons it offers about revolutionary cycles as extraordinary portals through which we can glimpse the ebbs and flows of past, present, and future. Carpentier's most celebrated book, *The Kingdom of This World*, is a fictionalized re-telling of the events surrounding the Haitian Revolution, which follows the trials and tribulations of Ti Noël, an enslaved laborer on a colonial sugar plantation in Saint Domingue. After Ti Noël's confidante, Makandal, loses his arm in a violent accident in the sugar mill, forcing him to flee the plantation, the events surrounding the Revolution are set into motion.

Both a real-life figure and a fictionalized character in The Kingdom of This World, François Makandal (b. date unknown, Africa – d. 1758, Cap-Français, Saint Domingue) has long been immortalized in Haitian lore as a formative 18th century rebel leader whose resistance, which indeed began on the plantation of a M. Lenormand de Mézy—as it

does in *The Kingdom of This World*—helped set the stage for the Haitian Revolution. In real life, as in Carpentier's text, a violent accident on the colonial sugar plantation where Makandal was enslaved resulted in the loss of his left arm. Makandal fled, finding refuge as a Maroon hiding among Saint Domingue's lush, mountainous landscape, where he learned to craft potions and poisons that would come to be used against the French colonial plantocracy. Makandal was eventually captured, though he briefly evaded execution, which further immortalized his acts of resistance. It is said that he escaped certain death by transforming from his mortal body into non-human, insect form—a national myth that Carpentier adopted as a central plot point in *The Kingdom of This World*. In reality, Makandal could not escape the brutal hand of his French captors, who burned him at the stake in January 1758.

Carpentier's character of Ti Noël is based on the supposedly fictionalized individual of the same name who first appeared in the Haitian play *Le Torrent* in 1940, just three years prior to Carpentier's sojourn to northern Haiti that would inspire him to write *The Kingdom of This World*. This celebrated, nationalist play dramatized the late eighteenth-century "torrent" of revolutionary insurgency and striving for Black freedom that ushered in Haiti's birth. In the play, Ti Noël is an African-born enslaved laborer in colonial Saint Domingue who, having fled the plantation, goes on to lead the Black insurgency as a Maroon, forging the path for a free nation.

In *The Kingdom of This World*, however, Ti Noël acts not as a revolutionary protagonist, but rather as the reader's eyes and ears, granting us access to the extraordinary historical events of the time, while remaining somewhat frustrated by his incapacity to transcend a lonely fate. During this volatile era of upheaval, Ti Noël journeys to find a place for himself as a free man on an island where he was once enslaved. We see him almost as a martyr as he carries the reader across landscapes and decades.[1] As the Revolution's impact is felt across the region, Ti Noël struggles to find fulfillment and community amid such monumental social change.

[1] For a discussion of Ti Noël as a "*figura Christi*," see Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 144.

Carpentier cleverly weaves these profound political shifts into the marvelous tale of Ti Noël's many spiritual and physical transformations during his impossibly long life (one of the many *marvelous* rhetorical elements in the book). Along the way Ti Noël encounters important landmarks and figures across the north of Haiti, including Makandal, with whom he was enslaved on the plantation of M. Lenormand de Mézy, and the revolutionary leader-cum-self-appointed monarch King Henri Christophe, who imprisons Ti Noël and sentences him to hard labor constructing the formidable stronghold of Citadelle Laferrière, today a UNESCO World Heritage site. Although Ti Noël witnesses a time of great political change in Haiti, he remains a perpetual outsider in *The Kingdom of This World*, shuffled from one circumstance to the next, one monarchy to another, finding lasting peace and contentment just beyond his grasp. Ultimately, the book ends with Ti Noël contentedly succumbing to death, though his search for belonging is left unresolved. Carpentier's interpretation of the Haitian Revolution thus walks a complex and rich line between a unique era of political transformation and the timeless, universal struggles for freedom, community, and justice that resonate across the ages, particularly in post-colonial contexts.

In July of 1944, five years before he published T*he Kingdom of This World*, Alejo Carpentier wrote a column for the *Gaceta del Caribe* lauding the work of painter Wifredo Lam for his countryman's ability to render a convincingly "tropical atmosphere" on the canvas.[2] For Carpentier, the "tropics" best revealed themselves after the artist's "prolonged absence" from Cuba, wherein he returned to his homeland with fresh eyes (Lam spent over ten years working in Europe, much like Carpentier, who, after residing in Cuba since infancy, fled his adoptive homeland for Paris from 1928 to 1939). Carpentier perceived this overseas sabbatical as a wayfinding affair, one that sharpened Lam's Caribbean aesthetic through more pronounced representations of lush vegetation, Afro-diasporic spirituality, and motifs related to plantation and post-plantation ecologies than he pro-

[2] Alejo Carpentier, "Reflexiones acerca de la pintura de Wifredo Lam," *Gaceta del Caribe* (La Habana, Cuba), no. 5 (July 1944): 26–27. ICAA, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston – Record ID 1125607. Recently, curator María Elena Ortiz has centered African and Caribbean diasporas, including Suzanne Césaire's mid-century ecopoetics in Tropiques, in Surrealist discourse and history in the exhibition *Surrealism and Us: Caribbean and African Diasporic Artists Since 1940* (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2024).

duced prior to his travels. In Carpentier's view, achieving a persuasive artistic "atmosphere"—however nostalgic, even magical the notion—was thus a product of distance, a process that unfolds through migration and across time. As an émigré with a peripatetic lifestyle largely necessitated by his political opposition to Gerardo Machado's Cuban regime, Carpentier was perhaps projecting his own life of exile onto Lam's experiences and its affordances of a newfound perspective on how to re-present, or re-imagine, land, culture, and community once left behind.

Fittingly, Carpentier published these remarks in 1943, mere months after his first trip to Haiti. While there, Carpentier "breathed in the atmosphere of Henri Christophe," in the writer's own words, traversing the fabled kingdom of the revolutionary Black monarch on a sojourn that would inspire him to research the origins of the Haitian Revolution and to write *The Kingdom of This World.* Combing through the archives, and inspired by the Surrealist fervor of the day, Carpentier found the revolutionary documents he encountered to reveal a "marvelous reality,"[3] which was equally informed by how the contemporaneous literary, political, and artistic movements of Négritude and Surrealism were radically foregrounding anti-colonial and Afro-diasporic voices in the region. While today Carpentier's rhetorical framework, what he called *lo real maravilloso* [the marvelous real], sits somewhat restlessly in a space between nostalgia, speculative fiction, and ethnography, it was, in its moment, part of a significant groundswell of pan-Latin American and Caribbean voices (re)telling revolutionary stories.[4] Carpentier's "marvelous" interpretation—a re-imagining of Haitian history through a diasporic lens unbound by linear time or realism—soon became adopted as a progenitor of what would become known as magical realism, a literary genre that was uniquely by and of the Americas.[5]

Each artist in *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* harnesses Carpentier's vision of Haiti's revolutionary "atmosphere" as a point of departure to explore how the Caribbean's past—with its long history of subjugation, resistance, and rebellion—reasserts and reinvents itself

[3] Alejo Carpentier, *De lo real maravilloso americano* (México: DF: UNAM, Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, 2003), 11. This publication emerged from Carpentier's initial writings for the first edition prologue of *El reino de este mundo* [The Kingdom of This World], in 1949.

[4] Carpentier was not alone in his efforts to recount the events of the Haitian Revolution in the mid-twentieth century. His work was likely directly inspired by two particularly notable publications, in addition to many other works dedicated to Black liberation, anti-colonial rhetoric, and Caribbean history. In 1938, Trinidadian historian CLR James published *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, which argued that the Haitian Revolution was a feat of the "modern proletariat" overcoming colonial oppression. Additionally, Martinican poet Aimé Césaire authored the three-act play *Et les chiens se taisaient* [And the Dogs Were Silent] in 1943, the same year Carpentier traveled to Haiti, which dramatizes events surrounding the Haitian Revolution.

in the present. For these artists, time need not be linear to be true; a radical questioning and unsettling of narrative is not only possible but can also be more real than the stories inscribed in Eurocentric histories. Just as *The Kingdom of This World* broke free (however romantically) from the dogmas of European literary realism in search of silenced truths, so, too, do the artists in this exhibition manifest spectral worlds that help us to see the truths of Haitian history and its global impact anew today.

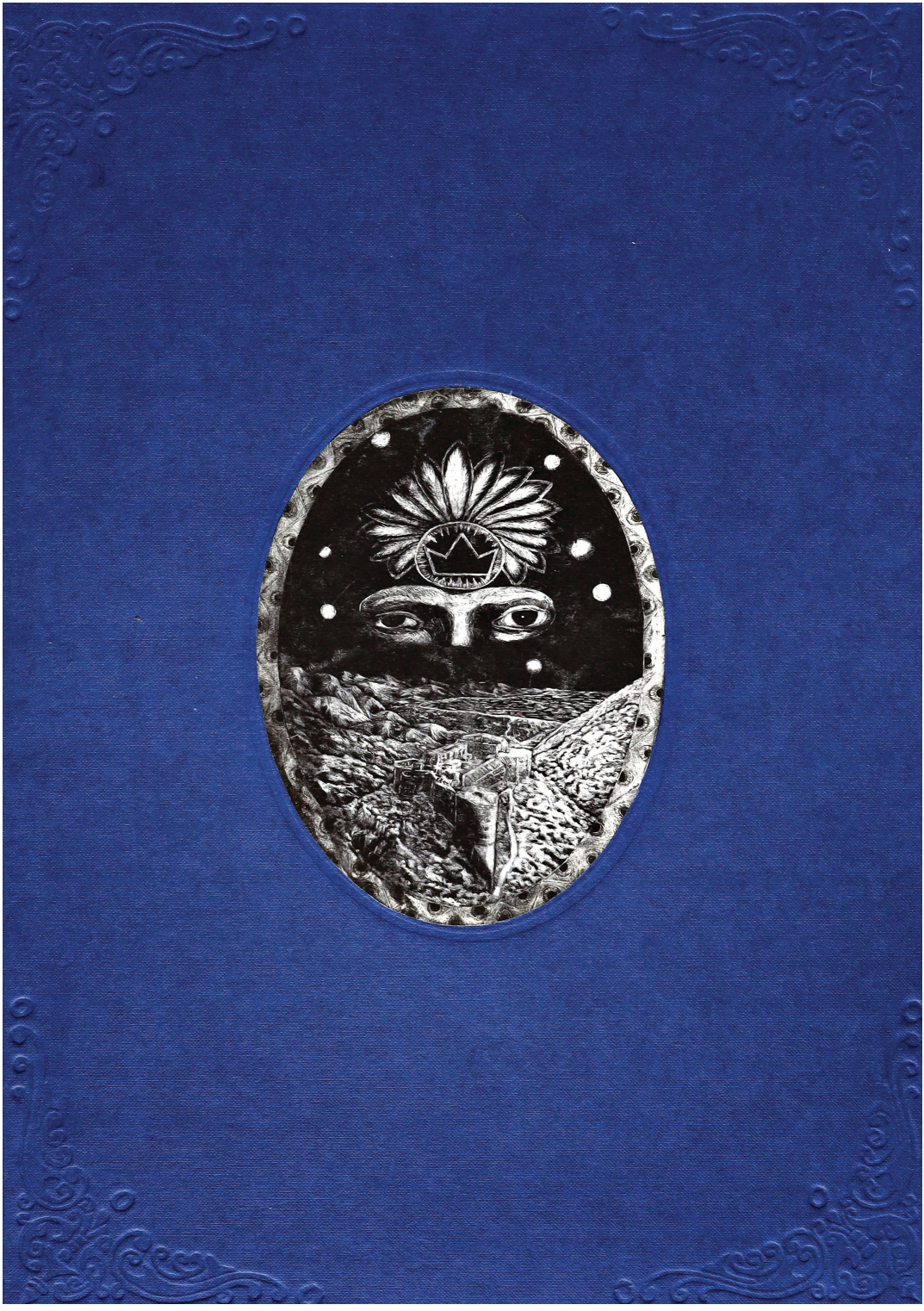
[5] It was not until the 1960s that Carpentier would be credited as a "precursor" and "practitioner" of magical realism. See Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 108.

Artist Edouard Duval-Carrié first introduced me to *The Kingdom of This World*, a book that has been lesser-distributed in the United States, but that is widely read throughout the rest of the hemisphere in its Spanish, French, and English editions. For Duval-Carrié, the novel proved a formative lens into his own Haitian heritage; he initially read the book as a child living in Puerto Rico after he and his family fled the violent authoritarian political regime of then-Haitian president François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. According to the artist, Carpentier's book was his "first contact with Haiti," a homeland from which he became distanced in his youth. Ever since, the novel's vivid imagery and hyper-stylized presentation of historical events has resonated with Duval-Carrié's artistic and diasporic imagination. Duval-Carrié began directly working with Carpentier's text in 2014, through his Plexiglas etchings of vignettes from *The Kingdom of This World*. The fifteen panels in the series are inspired by specific passages from the book, and when viewed in sequence the work carries us from the book's beginning to end. But Duval-Carrié also offers the viewer an experience distinct from and transcendent of the textual narrative. Formally composed like windows into another world, the plates are mediated through layered framings—the heavyset wooden frames that Duval-Carrié physically constructed for the panels as well as the *trompe l'oeil* borders etched in a whimsical French Rococo style that encase each scene—which position the viewer at a mediated distance from the tumultuous subjects at hand.

Duval-Carrié's composition reminds us that we are producers and products of storytelling, of histories narrated from and seen through a mediated frame. These panels are poignant meditations on the follies of memory, visuality, globalization, and history, which Duval-Carrié then further complicates by replicating these scenes in multiple modalities, including an artist's book of the series (composed of printed plates from the Plexiglas etchings), and mixed-media paintings on aluminum that give further color and texture to the same vignettes. No one version is original or authentic; rather, the series gathers meaning, complexity, and historicity with each iteration. Like the fabled myth of Makandal's mysterious transformations or the fictionalized and impossibly long life of Ti Noël, Duval-Carrié's works based on this book become iterative, with scenes and motifs that grip our imagination and vividly construct a new perception of the crucible out of which Haiti and other Caribbean nations have been forged.

In many ways, this exhibition, *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined,* emerges from Duval-Carrié's model of engagement with Carpentier's text. The artworks in this exhibition may vary widely in style and content, but each artist shares in the desire to craft a visual vernacular that reimagines Haiti's revolutionary history rooted in Caribbean communities, realities, and visualities.[6] For Duval-Carrié and all of the artists in this exhibition, the Caribbean is not just a geographic region; it is also an idea, forged through the continual knitting together of seemingly disparate sites, cultures, languages, and ecologies, each entangled with the other through a radical rethinking of what a "tropical atmosphere" entails.

[6] Duval-Carrié—like Carpentier, Lam, and many of the artists in this exhibition who speak from a place of emigration and diaspora—mobilizes his transnational context into a new visual language of the "global Caribbean," a concept he used as inspiration for the "Global/Borderless Caribbean Exhibition Series," an initiative he began in 2009 as Director of the Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance in affiliation with the Little Haiti Cultural Center, in Miami, where *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined,* was initially staged. The goal of this initiative and, by extension, the notion of the "global Caribbean," is to position Caribbean subjects in relation to global histories as a way of dismantling the siloed nature of Caribbean art and to better cultivate networks capable of addressing present-day issues within the Caribbean diasporic community in Miami and beyond.



Le Royaume Et Moi

Edouard Duval-Carrié

My first recollection of Alejo Carpentier's novel, *The Kingdom of This World*, was with my Spanish language professor at my secondary school in Puerto Rico. He was most amused that he had a Haitian student in class and would halt his class and go in a tirade about the "*most fascinating*" novel he had ever read. He would question me about passages of the novel which I had not yet read nor was I informed of the particulars concerning the colonial history of my place of birth, Haiti. It made me realize that the three-hundred years or so from the Spanish conquest and the subsequent period of the French occupation of the island were reduced to the first chapter in the history book we had used in primary school. Our history really began with our glorious revolution and continued in a blow-by-blow account of all subsequent events that occurred throughout the tortuous chronicle of the first Black republic in the modern world. It was as vexing not to have the details of the horrors of the first "encounter," which managed to exterminate the tribes whom occupied the island at the time of "discovery," and the centuries of humiliation suffered by the deported Africans until they rose, rebelled and finally won over their liberty by repelling the most organized army of their time—Napoleon's army and the expedition he ordered to quell the slave rebellion and put the recalcitrant slaves back where they belonged, the sugarcane fields on the island.

When I decided it was time to read the novel my first impression was that it was rather short if not concise. I almost thought there was little to say about the period that was absent from the official history books given to us. How could three centuries be summarized in less than forty pages? Was I wrong! From the novel's first sentence it was evident that the written words possessed the same spell that some works of art could muster. The likely reason for the Haitian political class to have erased the memory of the days of enslavement, which lasted over two centuries, was

Image on Page 26:
Edouard Duval-Carrié
Portfolio cover of *The Kingdom of This World*, 2019
Artist book, limited edition of 10 boxed sets of 14 serigraphs
Artist Proof Studio, Johannesburg, South Africa
© 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

that the memory of those wretched days were more than horrible in the details than anyone could bear. Regardless, Haiti's elite and political classes won their freedom and likely had their hands full as they had embarked on a most novel project—that of building the first Black sovereign nation of the "modern" world, which by its mere existence had to deal with the scorn and contempt of all other sovereign nations. Nation building is a most difficult task particularly when your subjects and populations stem from the four corners of continental Africa. Centuries ago, they probably had never heard of the folks standing next to them. Haiti could thus be described as the most Pan-African state, this long before the term was coined.

Suffice to say that Carpentier's novel was an education in broad strokes of the prerevolutionary period when masters were French and slaves were just that. As a colony, Saint Domingue was the crown jewel of the French empire. They managed to corner the market for sugar by what some called an industrial miracle. The only miracle, per se, was that the sole engine that generated this wealth was the labor of slaves whose obsolescence was cruelly calculated to a mere four years on the plantation.Carpentier does not need to explicitly state the above. His ruse is to give readers the matter-of-fact tone of a storyteller intent on impartiality and omniscience. But we, the readers, receive the story as an exaggerated account so extraordinary as to become a fable. Fate transformed into magic makes for a compelling story!

There is the tale of Makandal, a convicted rebel, renegade and poisoner in the estimation of the French, while in the eyes of the enslaved, Makandal is a healer, religious leader and powerful commander, captured and sent to the pyre for his misdeeds, where he miraculously escapes as a mosquito! and so metamorphoses ensue on and on…One of his alleged victims, Mme. Lenormand de Mézy, already alerted to the poisoning spree in the colony, decides to only consume things that she could control provenance, hence reduced to consuming fruits whose harvest she had supervised, including a lovely orange that had poisoned her

before she had consumed the last wedge. And so on and so on...

The novel felt so extraordinary upon first read that I truly thought of Carpentier as the most inventive of storytellers. After many years of learning about the island, I realize that the author had dug deeply into history and relayed it in a most factual manner, neither with artifice nor exaggeration. It was indeed the book I needed to glean what happened prior to the revolution. Certainly not exhaustive in its account, but vivid enough to establish a nightmarish tale that only blind greed could produce.

Today, I am fascinated by the many ways in which the novel has been discussed and the ripple effects across genres, such as magical realism—a fact that has perhaps tarnished its reputation, especially among Central and South American intelligentsia. Nonetheless, *The Kingdom of This World* still holds sway, and artists continue to respond to its allure.

Essays

Roberto Juarez
First Vulture, 2019
Collage on wood with acrylic
© 2024 Roberto Juarez

Richard Evans
Portrait of Henri Christophe, King of Haiti, c. 1816
Oil on canvas, 34 ¼ x 25 ½ in.
Alfred Nemours Collection of Haitian History, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

Kingdom of the Next World: The suicide of Henry Christophe

Marlene L. Daut

> *"But what surprised Ti Noël most was the discovery that this marvelous world, the like of which the governors of the Cap had never known, was a world of Negroes."*
>
> – Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*

The Queen was praying over the inert body of her husband, Henry Christophe, who had become King of Haiti in March 1811.[1] Her teenage children—Prince Victor-Henry and Princesses Anne-Athénaïre and Françoise-Améthyste—knelt by her side, softly weeping. Only moments earlier, the king's men had told Queen Marie-Louise what she already feared: Christophe, betrayed by his own military and nearly all his closest confidants, had shot himself in the heart. Night had fallen, and the palace was alarmingly quiet. The king's deathbed was cloaked in the kind of incongruous, placid calm that rarely accompanies the sudden discovery of a suicide. Christophe's blood had stained the white sheets; his eyes were fixed open in a wide, sad stare.

The serenity of the scene was only interrupted when the king's doctor and several of his oldest advisors entered the bedroom. The palace's gates would at any moment be breached. The royal family needed to hide Christophe's body if they hoped to save it from the terrible fate that had befallen the Emperor Dessalines, whose corpse was torn to pieces when it was dragged through the streets of Port-au-Prince after he was assassinated nearly fourteen years earlier to the day.[2] The king's personal guards, the Royal Dahomets, were summoned to assist the queen and her children, as they attempted to carry the body up to Christophe's famous fortress, the Citadel Henry, located atop Pic Laferrière in northern Haiti.

[1] See Marlene L. Daut, "The King of Haiti's Dream," *Aeon* (July 14, 2020), https://aeon.co/essays/the-king-of-haiti-and-the-dilemmas-of-freedom-in-a-colonised-world.

[2] See Julia Gaffield, "Meet Haiti's founding father, whose black revolution was too radical for Thomas Jefferson," *The Conversation* (August 30, 2018), https://theconversation.com/meet-haitis-founding-father-whose-black-revolution-was-too-radical-for-thomas-jefferson-101963.

The long gravel road to the fortress, around five miles from Sans-Souci Palace, winds up the mountain at a barely passable, dangerous thirty-five-degree angle. Once the defunct king's cortège reached the top of the Citadel, Christophe's guards helped Marie-Louise and her children dig a shallow grave in an interior courtyard, where they buried the king's remains before pouring lime over him. Barely a dozen people attended the makeshift internment that marked the unceremonious end of the self-proclaimed "first monarch crowned in the New World."[3]

[3] *La Gazette Royale d'Hayti* (July 19, 1815), https://lagazetteroyale.com/19-juin-1815/.

Gottfried Küstner
Sans Souci, Castle of King Christopher of Haiti, 1826
Lithograph
Published in Carl Ritter, *Naturhistorische Reisen ach der westindischen Insel Hayti* (Stuttgart: Hallberger, 1836)

Edouard Duval-Carrié
Ti Noël à Sans Souci, 2018
Mixed media on aluminum
© 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Tempted to blame the legendary tyranny that led the St. Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott to refer to the Haitian king as a "squalid fascist" who "chained [his] own people," so many writers have searched in vain for a lesson in Christophe's death. In his novel, *The Kingdom of This World*, Cuban author Alejo Carpentier gives recourse to the legends of 19th-century British travelers to explain how quickly all the king's men had turned against him: "The bulls' blood that those thick walls [of the Citadel] had drunk was an infallible charm against the arms of the white men. But this blood had never been directed against Negroes, whose shouts, coming closer now, were invoking Powers to which they made blood sacrifice." And just before he kills himself in Dan Hammerman's 1945 *Henri Christophe*, produced for the American Negro Theatre in New York City, the over-

wrought Haitian monarch reflects, "I don't know, maybe it's because a man has no right being a king in the first place." Yet kings and queens still exist, and history has shown that presidents are no more immune to the charge of base tyranny than monarchs, as Christophe's successor, President Jean-Pierre Boyer, would learn during the coup d'état that unseated and then sent him into exile in 1843.

The prolific Haitian historian Hénock Trouillot assigned a much simpler reason for King Henry's illegibility in global political thought: "At bottom, Christophe's greatest mistake," he said, "and that of his partisans, was to have disappeared too early from the scene, which is to say before the future historians of Pétion and Boyer's Republic, who were his most pitiless adversaries." In suicide, Christophe could effectively control his destiny, but he could not control his legacy. William Wilberforce, friend and frequent correspondent of the king, acknowledged as much when he remarked, "Poor Christophe! I cannot help grieving at the idea of his character's being left to the dogs and vultures to be devoured..."

The king of Haiti's tragic death is one of the most dramatized episodes in Haitian history—the scene appears in more than one of Walcott's plays as well as in Aimé Césaire's famous *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, and in plays by J.H. Amherst and Seldon Rodman.[4] But the tendency of historians and artists alike to portray Christophe's downfall as inevitable has obscured the intricate personal and political events that led to his dramatic demise, making his death one of the least understood moments in the history of the Americas.

[4] Marlene L. Daut, *The First and Last King of Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Henry Christophe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2025).

A veteran of the Haitian Revolution, Christophe was promoted by Emperor Jacques I to general-in-chief of the army of the Empire of Haiti in 1805. After Dessalines' assassination on October 17, 1806, Christophe was elected president of the newly founded Republic of Haiti.[5] Unhappy with the limited role of the presidency, however, Christophe fled to the north to establish his own state, declaring himself, "President and Generalissimo of the forces of the Earth and Sea of the State of Hayti."[6]

Fellow Haitian revolutionary General Alexandre Pétion became president of the opposing Republic in March 1807.[7] Afterwards, it became commonplace to describe Haiti as a country split in two, ruled by Christophe in the north and Pétion in the south. In reality, the political divisions were far more complicated and would have everything to do with the king's eventual downfall.[8]

On the northern half of Haiti's southwestern peninsula lies a mountainous region called Grand'Anse. Until February 1820, when Pétion's successor President Jean-Pierre Boyer conquered it, Grand'Anse was controlled by a formerly enslaved man named Jean-Baptiste Duperrier, known as Goman. Partial to General André Rigaud during the Haitian Revolution— the rival of the late General Toussaint Louverture[9]—Goman pronounced Grand'Anse independent from the other Haitian states at the beginning of the great schism. Even when Rigaud declared himself the leader of a fourth political entity on the southern side of the peninsula in 1810, Goman refused to surrender either his authority or the approximately seven hundred square miles over which he claimed sovereign power.

Despite refusing official incorporation into any of Haiti's separate states—Rigaud died in 1811 and the section he ruled was shortly thereafter absorbed into the Republic of Haiti—Goman did accept gifts from Christophe, then a king, including an opulent throne and a gold cross of the order of St. Henry. Goman's seeming deference to the king of Haiti led to natural conflict with the neighboring Republic. Pétion had previously tried and failed to overthrow Goman,

[5] For a digitized version of the 1806 constitution see "Haïti: Constitution du 27 décembre 1806," *Digithèque MJP*, https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/ht1806.htm.

[6] *La Gazette Royale d'Hayti* (August 6, 1807), https://lagazetteroyale.com/6-aout-1807/.

[7] See Dantès Bellegarde, "Alexandre Pétion: The Founder of Rural Democracy in Haiti," *Caribbean Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (December 1953): 167-173.

[8] See Chelsea Stieber, *Haiti's Paper War: Post-Independence Writing, Civil War, and the Making of the Republic, 1804-1954* (New York: NYU Press, 2020).

[9] Marlene L. Daut, "The Wrongful Death of Toussaint Louverture," *History Today* 70, iss. 6 (June 2020), https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/wrongful-death-toussaint-louverture.

and after Pétion unexpectedly died in March 1818, Boyer decided to try again. In 1819, the Republican Army began an ardent campaign to find and capture Goman, referred to as the God of the forests, who was hiding in the treacherous Mamelles mountains. The siege only ended when Goman, surrounded on all sides by Boyer's troops, leapt to his death from the heights of a mountaintop into the gulf below.

When Boyer greeted the victorious soldiers in coastal Jérémie on February 18, 1820, he intimated that this was but the first victory in his plan to reunite all of Haiti: "There remains more yet for you to do!" he said. "Forever listen for my voice and be ready, at the first signal, to march with me to consolidate stability and national glory."

To hear the king's contemporaries tell it, Providence would soon provide an opening. On August 15, 1820, the same day that a fire raged across the capital of the Republic in Port-au-Prince, King Henry collapsed after suffering a major stroke in Limonade. The royal family and other dignitaries were attending mass there to celebrate the queen's royal birthday and the Catholic Feast of the Assumption. After his collapse, the king's doctor, the Scotsman Duncan Stewart, was able to revive Christophe, but the king remained partially paralyzed on one side.

When the king returned to Sans-Souci in early September, Dr. Stewart observed that he had become increasingly paranoid and mistrustful. Christophe, who also envisioned reunification after Pétion's death, claimed to have learned through spies that Boyer was plotting to attack the city of Saint-Marc—along the boundary between the Kingdom and the Republic.

On September 14th, the still-recovering king received two high-ranking officers from the 8th demi-brigade of Saint-Marc, General Jean-Claude and Colonel Paulin, each of whom accused the other of colluding with the Republic. Fond of the saying, "where there's smoke there's fire," Christophe was known for punishing people on mere suspicion. Without hearing Paulin's full testimony, Christophe sided with

Jean-Claude and sent Paulin to prison. The regiment in Saint-Marc was partial to Paulin, however, and retaliated by murdering Jean-Claude. The border troops then delivered Jean-Claude's head to President Boyer as they voluntarily surrendered and offered to join the Republican Army.

When Christophe learned of the October 1st defection of the entire 8th demi-brigade, he dispatched troops from the neighboring bourg of Montrouis to oppose them. But instead of defending the kingdom, they joined the Republican army, reportedly cheering in the streets, *Vive la République! Vive le Président!* By October 6th, the insurrection had spread north all the way to Cap-Henry, where the Royal Prince's British teacher heard villagers shouting, *Down with the Tyrant!*

On the morning of October 8th, Christophe sent one last military brigade to try to crush the rebellion, but when he learned that those troops had also defected and joined the Republican Army, he told Dr. Stewart with resignation, "For my part, I know what I must do." The fatal shot by which Christophe removed himself from power rang out from his bedroom at around 7:30 that night.

When the royal family returned to the palace after having buried the king, they found their home had been invaded. Angry inhabitants from Cap and Milot were plundering the royal residence, stealing its expensive furniture, imported jewels, and looking for its hidden treasures. Soldiers shot at the ceiling of the Salle des Chefs, ruining the mural believed to have been painted by the British artist Richard Evans.[10] Far from trying to prevent this pillage, the king's soldiers, most of whom were in open insurrection, took part in it.

The next day, Marie-Louise and her daughters were arrested in Cap along with Prince Victor and Christophe's older son from a previous relationship, Prince Eugène. The nobles who

[10] Erica Moiah James, "Decolonizing Time: Nineteenth-Century Haitian Portraiture and the Critique of Anachronism in Caribbean Art," *Nka* 44, (May 2019): 8–23.

had remained loyal to the king, including Baron de Vastey and Generals Joachim and Daut, were also jailed.[11] Though Boyer had ordered the Republican Army to avoid bloodshed while securing the city of Cap, the directive came too late.

General Richard, the former Duke of Marmelade and the head of the conspiracy of the nobles, ordered the prisoners' deaths at around 10 PM on October 18th. Prince Victor pled for his life, reminding his father's former friends that his "only crime was to be the son of their enemy."[12] Richard responded by explaining that though the prince was just sixteen years old, as the heir to his father's throne, "the tranquility of the state demanded his life." Unable to shake the memory of those terrifying moments when her sons were taken from her, Marie-Louise decided to go to England with her daughters one year after the executions.

Although Marie-Louise had been by Christophe's side since the earliest days of the Haitian Revolution, and she eventually outlived her entire family, dying long after all of them in 1851, hardly any of the kingdom's many chroniclers bothered to consult her tale. Much later, while living in exile in Italy—as one of the only "black faces," in her words—she at last told her story to a British acquaintance who had been a frequent visitor at the palace.[13] She lamented having suffered through the deaths of her husband and all but one of her children, including that of her eldest son François Ferdinand, who died in Paris in 1805. Neither seeking recognition, glory, pity, or wealth, she sighed, "I have lost a husband, an empire, and [nearly] all my children... sorrow has quite weaned me from the vanities of this life; at my age and in my situation, I can only look forward to the next world, as a place of rest and peace."

It was the Harlem Renaissance-era playwright May Miller who best approached the silences of perspective in the well-worn story of the king's death with her 1935 one-act drama, "Christophe's Daughters." In the final scene of the play—which labors to produce Christophe as a father and son, husband and friend, revolutionary and monarch—Améthyste, Athénaïre, and Queen Marie-Louise remain tasked with

[11] Julia Gaffield, "Haitian Writer Baron de Vastey and Black Atlantic Humanism: An Interview with Marlene L. Daut," *Black Perspectives* (June 4, 2018), https://www.aaihs.org/haitian-writer-baron-de-vastey-and-black-atlantic-humanism-an-interview-with-marlene-l-daut/.

[12] Fredrik Thomasson, "Sweden and Haiti, 1791–1825: Revolutionary Reporting, Trade, and the Fall of Henry Christophe," *Journal of Haitian Studies, 24. 2* (2018): 4-35.

[13] "Account of Marie-Louise Christophe in Pisa by Sir Robert Inglis (October 20, 1840)," *Fanm Rebèl*, https://www.fanmrebel.com/archive/account-of-marie-louise-christophe-in-pisa-1840, excerpted from Robert H. Inglis, *Travels to Parma, Athens, Florence and Genoa* (1840), Canterbury Cathedral Archives.

carrying in “half-choked sobs” the burden of the king’s body and legacy.

Installation view of *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*, featuring Simryn Gill, *Pearls*, and Edouard Duval-Carrié, *The Kingdom of This World*. Pensacola Museum of Art, 2021.

Scherezade García
Utopian Dreams from this Side of the Atlantic I, 2018
Archival inkjet collage on paper
© 2024 Scherezade García

Caribbean Dreams, Lush Imaginations, and Theories of Freedom

Jerry Philogene

> *"Now it is a matter of seizing and admiring a new art, which...opens up to the artist unsuspected possibilities however, in the very spectacle of things ignored and silenced."*[1]
>
> - Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent* (1941-1945)

In the collection of her celebrated essays, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent* (1941-1945), Suzanne Césaire, one of the founding contributors to Négritude, Black modernism, and surrealism, and a co-founder of the Martinican literary and cultural journal, *Tropiques*, "reveals a shift in her analytical focus from the legacy of French colonialism in Martinique to the possibilities of a Pan-Caribbean belonging expressed through political practices and artistic creation."[2] During her five-month stay in Haiti in 1944, as a member of a cultural delegation of the French government, Césaire claims to have gained "total insight" into the "presence of the Antilles, more than perceptible, from places in which, like Kenscoff, the view over the mountain is unbearably beautiful."[3] As her gaze moves over the mountainous view of Kenscoff during her visit to the "cradle of Négritude's revolutionary spirit,"[4] Césaire "shift[s] her focus from the colonial relationship between Martinique and France to the Caribbean archipelago as a generative space within which an Antillean cultural and political renaissance could take place."[5] She theorizes "a Caribbean renaissance," which includes "Haiti, Martinique, Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean as interconnected spaces that are also the site of a new Caribbean civilization."[6] While her geographical focus may have been Martinique, what echoes across several of the essays in *The Great Camouflage* is the desire for Antillean autonomy and self-actualization that celebrates the complex and multicultural, multi-ethnic, and

[1] Suzanne Césaire, *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-45)*, edited by Daniel Maximin and translated by Keith L. Walker (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 17.

[2] Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 28. These seven short essays were published earlier in the Martinican cultural review *Tropiques* between 1941 and 1945. *Tropiques* (1941-1945) was founded in 1941 by Suzanne Césaire, Aimé Césaire, René Ménil, Lucie Thésée, and Aristide Maugée.

[3] Césaire, in "The Great Camouflage," in *The Great Camouflage: Writings of Dissent (1941-1945)*, edited by Daniel Maximin and Translated by Keith L. Walker (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 40-41.

[4] Aimé Césaire, C*ahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1956), 44.

[5] Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation*, 36.

[6] Ibid., 40.

multilingual archipelago. These rich and generative essays foreshadow the *antillanité* or *tout monde* of Édouard Glissant, the *créolité* of Patrick Chamoiseau, Jean Bernabé and Raphaël Confiant, and the transgressive subconsciousness evident in Alejo Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). Correspondingly, the Dominican-born, New York-based interdisciplinary visual artist Scherezade García, whose artistic practice includes drawing, painting, collage, s oft sculpture, mixed media, and site-specific multimedia installations. García's artwork brings together a visual kaleidoscope for thinking about colonialism, aesthetics, and identity; one that is based on the similar creative forces and imaginations that compelled Césaire's reflections on magical realism, surrealism, and the formation of a decolonial project.

The seed for writing *The Kingdom of This World* grew during Carpentier's 1943 visit to Haiti and the ruins of Palais Sans Souci and la Citadelle Laferrière, a few months prior to Césaire's visit and her "total insight." *The Kingdom of This World* offers the opportunity to imagine the potentialities of revolution and liberation despite incongruities in the material conditions of liberation.[7] It is a work of magical realism or *marvelous realism* or what Carpentier called "*lo real maravilloso*" that chronicles a select and fictionalized retelling of the events of the Haitian Revolution through the lens of the Haitian people and its cultural and religious traditions. Specifically, the events, and their aftermath, are narrated through the eyes of the enslaved young man, Ti Noël whose character looms large as a refutation of European colonialism while centering a specific Latin American/Caribbean Black subjectivity. The same sort of ghostly specter of the historical self is deeply ingrained in the three artworks by García in the exhibition, *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*. Her work, like Césaire's essays, "opens up avenues of inquiry pertaining to the relationships between the Caribbean island and the great circum-Caribbean region,"[8] and like Carpentier, her work evokes the African presence in the Caribbean.

[7] Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert writes that *The Kingdom of This World* was written after Carpentier returned to Cuba from France in 1939 and, like many disillusioned Latin American and Caribbean writers and intellectuals, according to Roberto González Echevarría joined a "widespread movement whose purpose was 'a search for origins, the recovery of history and tradition,' the foundation of an autonomous American consciousness serving as the basis for a literature faithful to the New World." Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, "The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-Reading of Alejo Carpentier's 'The Kingdom of This World,'" *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 2. (special issue on Haiti, 1804-2004: Literature, Culture and Art, Summer 2004): 114-127. See Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 107.

[8] Lesley A. Wolff, "Exhibition Overview," *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*, exhibition brochure (Miami: Little Haiti Cultural Center, 2021).

Using conceptual approaches, García has produced an engaging body of work focusing on the interplay among culture, history, memory, and gender expressions. Through a rich variety of mediums—drawing, painting, site-specific installations, and printmaking—she has developed critical strategies that have become distinctive markers of her art. García takes as her subject the fraught and turbulent histories of the Dominican Republic and the Americas, thus her works reside within the significant tensions created between historical narratives and racialized power. What we see in her artistic practice are swirls of color, organic shapes, female allegorical images, and intricate layering of materials and textures that create formal and material spaces to explore the history of colonization, enslavement and racialization. Bound by dominant theories of culture, modernity and globalization, these works are inspired largely by her experiences as an immigrant from the Dominican Republic living in New York City. In particular, I am interested in how García's paintings allow for a contemplation of aesthetics as both *theory* and *praxis*—as art pieces that visualize freedom and, in their creation, articulate empowerment.

Utopian Dreams from This Side of the Atlantic I (2018) and *Utopian Dreams from This Side of the Atlantic II* (2018) are intricately layered and boldly composed mixed media works on paper that draw on a variety of sources. They incorporate abstraction and representative images that are both translucent and opaque. Their built-up surfaces are created through the overlaying of drawings, colored paper cutouts, and ink jet-printed images of figures taken from previous paintings. These dynamic compositions reflect how themes such as the history of colonization and enslavement, the history of silenced traumas, the performative nature of gender, and the aesthetics of beauty are intricately interwoven and reproduced in her artworks. In *Utopian Dreams from This Side of the Atlantic I* the silhouette of Ulises Hilarión Heureaux Leibert (1845-1899), also known as Lilís, a former president of the Dominican Republic, whose father was born in Haiti to a French man and an enslaved Black woman, and his mother was from Saint Thomas. Surrounded by palm trees and swirls of white and gray clouds and colored-paper

cutouts, Lilís' figure dominates and takes center stage in the composition, compelling us to remember the violence perpetuated on Haitians in October 1937 by Rafael Leónidas Trujillo's Dominican government that continues today to affect the very people whose culture and ethnic heritage are connected to Lilís. The inclusion of Lilís' image creates a visual archive of a moment in history and demands that we think of the past as central to the making of the present.

In *Utopian Dreams from This Side of the Atlantic II*, García features two female figures: one placed at the bottom center of the canvas and the other placed upside down at the center top. Both images are taken from previous works of art. This repurposing of images and ideas is integral to García's practice. They speak to the continuity so important in familial memories and historical narratives. There is a friction between the overlaid images, and it is within the interstices that significant tensions about representation and belonging emerge and bear witness to history, placing these histories and visual elements directly in the Caribbean—drawing a transatlantic circle that begins in Europe, crosses over to Africa, and resides in the Americas. Together these two pieces complete a compelling image of complex and intricately busy compositions, creating a layered visuality that reveals as much as it conceals.

Scherezade García
Caribbean Dream, 2019
Mixed media on canvas
© 2024 Scherezade García

These paintings incorporate both historical and cultural narratives to explore the ways in which, through beauty, one "conquer[s] the oppressor, and with an enticing seduction, colonizes the colonizer."[9] They are conceptually rich, visually stunning, and inventively intricate, imbued with vivid colors, swirling shapes and forms, and compelling silhouettes. They have, in essence, a sensual and tactile quality, which is perhaps best seen in *Caribbean Dream* (2019), in its formal quality as portrait and part of a representational tradition. Dressed for the Carnival masquerade, the female figure's elaborate dress belies the status such a woman, a *mulâtresse*, would have, or perhaps not, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Saint-Domingue. Loose, gestural brushstrokes create a gown of peacock feather-like ruffles that cover her brown skin, the painted fingers of her right hand splay across the deep blue fan while the other is coquettishly placed on her lap. She regards the viewer with a seemingly all-knowing gaze. Her sagacious nature is reflected in her penetrating gaze and the theatrical placement of her fan, and the elaborate hairstyle and tignon fashioned by swirls of blues, yellows, and black.[10] In the abstract background, rich blues, and sparks of gold and white illuminate areas of black to create an iridescent backdrop for the tones of browns of her face and hands, which signal the presence of Africa. This figure's elegant, self-assured gaze reveals through formal rigor and painterly skill all that she represents within and against the "tradition of British and French aristocratic portraiture of the eighteenth century" as well as ideas about traditional standards of beauty.[11] The shadowy presence of three individuals stands as perhaps this artwork's most significant compositional element. To the left of the female figure reside two silhouetted profiles of dancing figures, entranced in the frenzied and deep bodily music of Carnival. In the shadows to the right of the main female figure resides the silhouetted profile of a man—perhaps another appearance of Lilís—dressed in an imperial royal costume and plumed hat, as he too, imaginably, participates in the sartorial splendor and frolic that is part of the carnivalesque.

9 Olga U. Herrera, "A Bridge Between Beauty and Tragedy: An Interview with Scherezade García," in *Scherezade García: From This Side of the Atlantic*, ed. Olga U. Herrera (Washington, DC: Art Museum of the Americas, 2020), 33.

10 Tignons, a hair covering, were forced upon Creole women of color, whether enslaved or not, to prevent them from showing their beauty and thus not compete with white women for the "attention" of white men. This compulsory measure also functioned as a controlling directive to regulate the bodies of these women of color. However, many women found ways to make this forced sartorial mandate a becoming and expressive part of their racial and cultural identity.

11 Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, "Bodies of Color: Images of Women in the Works of Firelei Báez and Rachelle Mozman," *Small Axe* 21, no. 1 (March 2017, no. 52): 57–69.

Caribbean Dream speaks to García's desire to challenge and refute the "formulas of erasure" and conspicuous silences so essential to the colonial histories and contemporary racialized power structures that have participated in the abjection of certain Caribbean nations and the *tropicalization* of others.[12] In an interview with art historian and curator Olga U. Herrera, García says,

> As a woman and artist whose art is grounded in history and its silences, I am interested in representation. My work with politics of culture and colonialism, race and the persistence of racism, migration, and the expansion of borders reflects this interest and my own heritage.[14]

Swirls of deep blues, violets and oranges and areas of light and dark shadows and the elaborate swirls and ruffles of her dress, fan, and intricate hairstyle illustrate the baroque aesthetics of Creole identity. The figures drawn and printed on the three pieces serve as a sign of the presence of the past and as evidence of difference, a difference that is rendered through phenotype and lived out through the social and cultural material conditions of history. These works demand that the viewer take in multiple and competing histories to understand the various conceptual and artistic elements that create her sensorial works. Moving freely between diverse mediums and artistic practices, her creative works bring to light the intertextual and intermedial sphere of the intimacy of history, rooted in the experience of migration, creating an extensive and rich body of work. A keen and astute student of history and culture, her works are multilayered and provocative interplays between history, material, and process. García belongs to a transnational contemporary Caribbean art practice, one cognizant of the importance of a diasporic imagination that necessitates a certain freedom in going beyond the simplistic nature of a ubiquitous figure, one that encompasses the Caribbean as an archipelago, not bound to a specific island, a singular history, or a determined present.

[12] See the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) and Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) for detailed discussions on these ideas.

[13] Olga U. Herrera and Scherezade García, "A Conversation with Scherezade García," *Public Art Dialogue* 11, no. 1 (2021): 99.

Through an effective use of a wide colorful palette and dynamic imagery, she places painting as central to her artistic practice while challenging its formal assumptions, as illustrated in the multi-dimensional layeredness of her paintings. Her paintings are a studied and concentrated reading of art histories and histories that pertain to the Black Atlantic. She mines an array of archives (visual, literary, and historical) with meticulous details to time and process, at times distorting and moving them beyond their conventional meaning, as seen in the female figures that she highlights. Her oeuvre strives for a certain embodiment and theatricality enmeshed in the materiality of history and subjectivity. Combining the language of pan-Caribbean visual aesthetics, she draws cross-cultural connections, joining Africa and Europe to the Caribbean and eventually to North America. In these works, García maintains a language that expresses what performance artist Gina Athena Ulysse's calls *rasanblaj* that "blurs genres, shifting location, time, and space to double-dutch the line between the sacred and the profane"[14] to create works influenced by local idioms as well as transnational aesthetic grammar. Through her dually ingenious material invigoration of form and texture, sparked by historical references, García follows a creative path of her own making. I describe this aesthetic strategy as the sculpting of an intelligible visual history, by which I mean a painterly language that bears witness to modes of abstraction and representation through the dynamic intricacies and nuances of a historical prism. Furthermore, García offers intriguing insights into what Kobena Mercer refers to as the "creative energies of…cut-and-mix-aesthetics." Such an aesthetic allows for "improvisational aspects of the black vernacular, which selectively appropriates what is given or found in one's environment and transforms it into raw material for one's distinct stylistic signature."[15]

Theorizing García's use of the Dominican Republic and Haiti's entrenched political history of racialization allows for a rich and provocative iconological analysis that suggests the ways in which she captures the palimpsest of obscure and uncanny experiences as simultaneous aspects of her alterity. García's bold embrace of the interplay between

14 Gina Athena Ulysse, "Vodou as Idea: On Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's 'Ezili's Mirrors'." *Los Angeles Review of Books* (September 28, 2018), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/vodou-as-idea-on-omiseeke-natasha-tinsleys-ezilis-mirrors/ (accessed September 2021).

15 Kobena Mercer, "Diaspora Aesthetics and Visual Culture," in *Travel & See: Black Diaspora Art Practices Since the 1980s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 227, 232 and 234.

history and the aesthetic quality of materials enables her to explore the visceral spaces between representation and abstraction, between belonging and alterity,[16] between subjectivity and identity. She embraces the contradictions of living in the aftermath of colonial encounter and transatlantic enslavement. In imaginative ways, she counters the historical silences and erasures which are at the essence of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's argument that the Haitian Revolution, as a formative event, has been written out of the history of the Age of Revolution simply due to Haiti's radial conceptualization of liberty, equality, and humanity fundamentally challenging Eurocentric notions of modernity and the tenets that formed the Age of Enlightenment.

In her writings, Suzanne Césaire contributes to necessary discourses about how we might imagine a world that speaks to freedom, equality, the potentiality of art and the creative process in that (re)imagination. She shares with Carpentier the possibilities of an Antillean future devoid of neoimperialism and neocolonialism, albeit for Carpentier, his is captured through the prism of the magical real or *lo real maravilloso.* Likewise, García's work demands capacious and prescient analysis to *imagine* a different way of world-making, a different way to know and see Black and brown bodies in that world, and a different future for the Caribbean, especially at this moment in time.

16 Jerry Philogene, "Actes de Transformation: Mixing and Mapping Haitian Aesthetics," in *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago*, eds. Tatiana Flores and Michelle Ann Stephens (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 195.

José Bedia
[Detail from] *Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World)*, 2021
Mixed media on amate paper
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The Kingdom of Both Worlds: Convergences and Divergences of José Bedia and Alejo Carpentier

James López

> *"Hay una frase de don Miguel de Unamuno…'Hemos de hallar lo universal en las entrañas de lo local y en lo circunscrito y limitado lo eterno'. Ése ha sido mi lema."*
>
> – Alejo Carpentier

> *"Postmodernism, the idea that reality is fake and I show you how fake it is producing another fake, is wrong, to me…"*
>
> – José Bedia

> *"The substance was different, but the forms were the same."*
>
> *– The Kingdom of This World*

We post-moderns scavenge the exhausted forms left behind by Modernism's ruinous war against tradition, struggling in vain to find evidence of the sacred, potential anchors between the divine and the mundane, the transcendent and the banal. The overwhelming powers of modern technology to generate infinite content and an unceasing transmutation of forms—powers once reserved for gods—, have left us ever smaller, ever more distant from each other, from ourselves, and from the world. Modernism, having excised religion from its teleology, designed alternative and sanctioned pathways to the Divine Other, but the religious impulse remained intact, disguised behind the masks of -ologies and -isms manufactured in the intellectual workshops of Western rationalism. Aesthetic Modernism, tasked with exploring the limits of that rationality, was not immune from its doctrines and procedures, and so applied its talents to the dissection (and desiccation) of Art itself, a death

wish fueled by the need to contain, explain and exploit what is perhaps the most vital, universal and irreducible human experience of all: our encounters with the sublime, and the dissolution of difference in commerce with the Other. Alejo Carpentier was a high priest of Modernism, a true heresiarch, one whose doctrine—the *marvelous real*—spawned a new modernist sect—*magical realism*—with international reach and dedicated practitioners throughout the post-colonial world. Despite his overwhelmingly erudite mastery of the Western tradition, Carpentier was formed as an intellectual and artist in a country—Cuba—that had only (partially) freed itself of the colonial yoke two years prior to his birth, and where slavery had been abolished for less than twenty years. He belonged to a generation of Cuban writers, artists and intellectuals deeply committed to the exploration of their multiracial, multiethnic society through the discursive and aesthetic strategies of Modernism, and under the ideal of racial integration formulated by their apostle, the poet and independence leader José Martí.[1] Like many artists and intellectuals of his generation, Carpentier was concerned with articulating a unique Latin American identity, both of and against modernity, and he rightly identified those sectors of society not yet fully integrated into the Eurocentric world order as the source and foundation of the *difference* his generation was looking for. In the case of Cuba, this *difference* was to be found in the African religious traditions that remained intact, though marginalized, on the island. This is not unlike the role played by Pre-Columbian Indigenous culture in the iconography of the Mexican muralists for example, or the Anthropophagic Movement in Brazil. It can be seen as his generation's response, formulated in the idioms of Aesthetic Modernism, to the dilemma first articulated by Simón Bolívar in his 1815 *Letter from Jamaica*.[2]

José Bedia (b. 1959), meanwhile, is currently one of the most recognizable and internationally renowned Cuban artists of his generation, known for his striking incorporation of poorly-labeled "primitive," or traditional, artifacts and iconography in his work. He is also a prolific and intrepid lay anthropologist, who has spent the last four decades traveling throughout Africa and the Americas, spending

[1] Carpentier formed part of the Grupo Minorista organized around the *Revista Avance* (1927-30), which included many canonical figures in Cuban intellectual history: the great Afrocuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, writers and intellectuals such as Jorge Mañach, Emilio Ballagas, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, and many others. For more information, see Narciso J. Hidalgo, "Reflexiones sobre la cultura cubana: ¿el negrismo: moda o búsqueda de identidad e integración racial?" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 59-70; also see Eduardo Devés Valdés, "Afroamericanismo e identidad en el pensamiento latino-americano en Cuba, Haití y Brasil, 1900-1940," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 25, no. 49 (2000): 53-75.

[2] "We are a small segment of the human race; we possess a world apart, surrounded by vast seas, new in almost every art and science, though to some extent old in the practices of civil society....we, who preserve only the barest vestige of what we were formerly, and who are moreover neither Indians nor Europeans, but a race halfway between the legitimate owners of the land and the Spanish usurpers...." From Simón Bolívar, *El Libertador: Writings of Simón Bolívar*, trans. Frederick H. Fornoff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

extended periods embedded in traditional cultures, and amassing a significant collection of artifacts that he displays in his home in Miami, and which, by his own admission, serve as the primary inspiration for his artwork, occasionally appearing alongside his creations.[3] Bedia is also an initiated priest of Palo Monte, the Cuban syncretic religion most closely resembling Haitian Vodou, and is a member of the Native American Church. Therefore, his inclusion among the artists of *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* provides a unique opportunity for a potentially radical recontextualization of the original novel from an artist who has centered both his life and his artwork precisely within that cultural difference that so concerned Carpentier's generation:

> I am trying to make the process (let us call it transcultural) which is currently appearing deep within many native cultures, appear within me in the same way, but the other way around. I am a man with a 'western' education who, through a personal, voluntary, premeditated system, is trying to get close to those cultures, and who is also experiencing their influences in an equally transcultural way.[4]

At first glance, it might appear that Bedia's religious practice places him in an oppositional mimetic position vis-à-vis Carpentier, whose adherence to the Western literary canon and representational practice is unquestioned. But this would be wrong. In many ways, Bedia's visual reimagining of *The Kingdom of This World* repurposes some of the key precepts and concerns of Carpentier's aesthetics, and shares, at least in principle, the novel's stated goal of accurately representing (and occasionally broaching) the foundational divide that lies at the heart of what Carpentier called the "creole psyche" and what others might call the post-colonial subject; that is, the condition of containing in uneasy tension within oneself two historically irreconcilable worldviews: the traditional and the modern. The distaste Bedia has expressed toward postmodernism may derive from his religious faith or not, but more significantly, it derives from his aesthetic faith: a belief in the transformative power of art and representation, its ability to transcend the self

[3] See for example Alex Arthur, "José Bedia: Maker of Spiritual and Artistic Connections," *Tribal Art Magazine* (Summer 2015): 136-141.

[4] Cited in Orlando Hernández, "José Bedia: Introduction to a Cosmography," in *José Bedia: Works, 1978-2006* (New York: Ramis Barquet Gallery/TURNER, 2007), 24.

and expand the possibilities of being, and its connection to ancient forms of knowledge ignored by modern rationalism. Bedia, not unlike Carpentier, operates along the border between the non-Western and the Western, the traditional and the modern, aspiring to a syncretic representationalism that opens new possibilities for a reconciliation between them. Carpentier's formulation of the *marvelous-real*, together with its first and perhaps only true novel, *The Kingdom of This World*, was born of a similar desire, and a similar aesthetic faith. The forms might be different, but the substance is the same.

Carpentier readily admitted to having failed to render Black Cuban experience legible through avant-garde literary techniques in his first novel, *¡Ecue-Yamba-Ó! Historia Afro-Cubana* (1933), but was inspired to try again after a trip to Haiti in 1943 in what, by all accounts, was a fairly con-

José Bedia
[Detail from] *Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World)*, 2019
Mixed media on amate paper
© 2024 José Bedia

ventional tour, including staged performances of voodoo "rituals."[5] *The Kingdom of This World* appeared six years later. It is significant that in the time between the publication of both novels, Carpentier lived for over a decade in Paris, in close contact with the artists and writers of the Surrealist movement. In Carpentier, Miguel Angel Asturias, and later practitioners of so-called *magical realism*, Surrealist dialectics—Rational/Irrational, Conscious/Unconscious, Masculine/Feminine, Technical/Magical, Civilized/Primitive and so forth—, are transposed onto the cultural realities of the Americas in an effort to reconcile the European and non-European elements present *and active* in those societies. And much like the Surrealists did in their own search for the marvelous,[6] Carpentier inverts the inherited (colonial) hierarchy of value, favoring instead those elements that he believes to be more vital, more generative and more authentic, represented by those sectors of Latin American society that had retained their pre-contact beliefs and practices, be they African or Indigenous American. This is not to say that Carpentier's perception and appreciation of Vodou and African religiosity was entirely contrived and false, but simply limited and undeniably colored by his own ideological biases, aesthetic aspirations, analytical disposition and didactic intentions, which Carpentier himself acknowledged given his positionality.[7]

Too much has been made of the prologue to the first edition of *The Kingdom of This World*, and in particular to the following declaration: "...the experience of the marvelous presupposes a certain faith. Those who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with saintly miracles...."[8] Unlike José Bedia, Carpentier did not believe in saints. Rather, the faith to which he refers is merely the un-self-reflexive authenticity of cultural practices untouched by the critical self-consciousness that characterizes Modernity.[9] This is the crux of his critique and dismissal of Surrealism as a contrived and formulaic attempt to access a lost connection to the "Other Side," the "Irrational," the "Unconscious," the "Primitive," the "Sacred," the "Sublime," or any of the labels by which Rationalism attempts to designate that which lies beyond its reach. For Carpentier, the word "mar-

[5] See Ali Tal-mason, "Voyage to the Marvelous: A Traveler's Guide to *The Kingdom of This World*," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (January 2020): 50-68; also see Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-Reading of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*," *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 114-127.

[6] An interesting critique of Carpentier's somewhat affected rejection of surrealism can be found in Nancy Gray Díaz, "The Metamorphoses of Maldoror and Mackandal: Reconsidering Carpentier's Reading of Lautréamont," *Modern Language Studies* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 48-56.

[7] An extended 1977 interview with Carpentier is available online where he discusses many of these issues in depth. See "Alejo Carpentier a fondo – edición completa y restaurada, con presentación de J. Soler Serrano," YouTube, uploaded by *EDITRAMA* (June 28, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inF8qRk4RDU .

[8] It is worth pointing out that this prologue was excluded from all future editions. Its premises and theories would be developed and expanded in the much longer 1975 conference, "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso," in which there is no mention of "faith." See Erik Camayd-Freixas, *Realismo mágico y primitivismo: relecturas de Carpentier, Asturias, Rulfo y García Márquez* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 105.

velous" simply denotes that which cannot be explained rationally nor accessed via aesthetic contrivance: "...the marvelous invoked in disbelief—as was the habit of surrealists for so many years—was nothing more than a literary ruse."[10] It is not so much a lack of religious faith that concerns Carpentier, but rather the excess of Sartrean, *bad faith* that is the primary obstacle to accessing that which is marvelous, the *real* marvelous, not its anemic, manufactured doppelganger.

Carpentier was cognizant of the limits of language (and art) to cross over, capture and make legible the Other.[11] He finds what he believes to be an aesthetic solution to this problem in what he classifies as *lo barroco*, not to be confused with the European Baroque, but understood rather as a cyclical paradigm or worldview as formulated by the Spanish philosopher Eugenio d'Ors.[12] The baroque, Carpentier affirms, is a "human constant," it is a "spirit" and not a "style." It is a recurring approach to representation—a *mimesis*—that appears cyclically in world cultures throughout history. Carpentier finds *lo barroco* in the Pre-Columbian civilizations of Mesoamerica, in the art and architecture of Classic Hindustan, in the Spanish *Edad de oro* of the seventeenth century, and of course, in the elaborate pantheons and opaque rituality of the syncretic African religions of the Caribbean and Brazil. *Lo barroco* is characterized by accumulation and overabundance, *horror vacui*, inclusivity and symbiosis, symbolic density and fractal proliferation:

> And why is Latin America the chosen territory of the baroque? Because all symbiosis, all *mestizaje*, engenders the baroque. The American baroque develops along with *criollo* culture, with the meaning of *criollo*, with the self-awareness of the American man, be he the son of a white European, the son of a black African, or an Indian born on the continent...the awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a *criollo*; and the criollo spirit is itself a baroque spirit.[13]

Lo barroco becomes the literary vehicle by which Carpentier positions himself as a *translator* of that Other

[9] Roberto González Echevarría emphasizes the enormous intellectual debt Carpentier's generation of Latin American writers owed to Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, in particular its distinction between *cultures* and *civilizations*: "For Spengler, as for Carpentier and other Latin American intellectuals who fell under his spell, the New World found itself in a moment of its historical evolution—a moment of faith—prior to the moment of reflexivity, while Europe felt estranged from the forms of its own culture and searched in laws and codes of universal pretensions, like Surrealism, the mystery of creation irretrievably lost." See Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 124.

[10] The frequent misinterpretation of *lo real maravilloso* comes from the positive connotations attached to its English translation as "marvelous," "extraordinary," "miraculous," and so forth. In Carpentier, "lo maravilloso" refers to that which is unexplainable, irrational, out of the ordinary: "Por lo tanto, debemos establecer una definición de lo maravilloso que no entrañe esta noción de que lo maravilloso es lo admirable porque es bello. Lo feo, lo deforme, lo terrible, también puede ser maravilloso. Todo lo insólito es maravilloso." See Alejo Carpentier, *La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo y otros ensayos* (México: Siglo XXI, 1981), 128.

[11] This will become the main theme of Carpentier's next, and perhaps best novel, *The Lost Steps* (1953). See González Echevarría, *Pilgrim at Home*, 155-202.

[12] Eugenio de D'Ors, *Lo barroco* (Madrid: Alianza, 2002).

which constitutes a foundational element of Latin American society. Much like the role played by the Unconscious in Surrealism (and Psychoanalysis), the African Other occupies the suppressed, mysterious and generative side of the Caribbean *criollo's* divided psyche, and *lo barroco* functions as a mimetic technique for making that Other *visible* and *legible* to the wider public.[14] It is a gesture of revealment and reconciliation—always incomplete and imperfect—between the Western and non-Western elements of Latin American society. Carpentier attempts to place himself at the limit where these two worlds meet, on the frontier between the rational and the irrational, which is where the marvelous reveals itself:

> ...the marvelous begins to exist unequivocally when it surges from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, from an unusual or singularly favorable illumination of the unsung riches of reality, perceived with particular intensity as a result of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of 'heightened state.'[15]

While a detailed commentary on *lo barroco* is beyond the scope of this essay, one of its prime features is the simultaneous representation of multiple referentialities, or what we might refer to in literary terminology as *semantic overdetermination*, or *symbolic polyvalence*. This technique pervades *The Kingdom of This World* beginning with its opening chapter, "Wax Heads," in which the enslaved Ti Noël contemplates a barber shop display of European model heads next door to a butcher shop's display of severed animal heads, which in turn is next to a bookseller's display of prints depicting figures of both European and African nobility. Another key instance of this simultaneous representation of multiple registers of reality, and one more in line with José Bedia's treatment of the novel, occurs in the chapter titled "The Metamorphosis," which narrates the execution/transformation of Makandal, the mutilated runaway turned *houngan*, or Vodou priest, whose esoteric knowledge of plants leads to the mass poisoning of French colonialists, and augurs the coming revolt that would initiate the Haitian Revolution. Both events (death/transformation)

[13] Alejo Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 100.

[14] "...la descripción de un mundo barroco ha de ser necesariamente barroca, es decir, el qué y el cómo en este caso se compaginan ante una realidad barroca. *Ante un Árbol de la vida*, de Oaxaca, yo no puedo hacer una descripción de tipo, llamaríamos, clásico o académico. Tengo que lograr con mis palabras un barroquismo paralelo al barroquismo del paisaje del trópico templado." See Carpentier, *La novela latinoamericana*, 133.

[15] It is worth noting that in the original Carpentier uses the term "estado límite" or "limit state" rather than "heightened state." See Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Barcelona: Ed. Planeta, 1986), 7-8.

José Bedia
[Detail from] *Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World)*, 2019
Mixed media on amate paper
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are recounted by the same heterodiegetic narrator; both occur simultaneously in the narration; and both are treated as equally plausible events, although only one can be considered truly *marvelous* in the sense described above. The narrator *sees* Makandal's transformation and escape, and also sees his immolation and muted cries of agony. The enslaved and the enslavers walk away satisfied with their respective perceptions of reality. Of course, Makandal's transformation into a wasp can be considered miraculous only from the perspective of the non-believer, which both author and reader (we must assume) are. But, in accordance with the ideological underpinnings of Carpentier's literary project, the narrator privileges the perspective of the believers as embodied by Ti Noël and the enslaved witnesses to the miracle, and in so doing, inverts the Western hierarchy of value in favor of the vital and unmediated energy of the *marvelous* over the flaccid sterility and conceptual stagnation of the *rational*:

> That afternoon the slaves returned to their plantations, laughing the whole way. Mackandal had fulfilled his promise to remain in the kingdom of this world. Once again the whites had been mocked by the Great Powers from the Other Shore. And while Monsieur Lenormand de Mézy, wearing his sleeping cap, made a comment to his saintly wife about the insensibility of the blacks before the suffering of one of their own –reaching some philosophical conclusions regarding the inequality of the races that he hoped to develop into a speech laced with Latin phrases– Ti Noël got one of the kitchen slaves pregnant with twins after sticking her three times in one of the mangers of the horse stable (33-34).

We turn our attention now to the exceptional series of works José Bedia created for *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*. Titled *Wayom Lemond—Kingdom of This World* in Haitian Creole—, these works suggest interesting affinities with Carpentier's aesthetic project, while also differentiating themselves in significant and fascinating ways. It is worth keeping in mind that Bedia makes a clear distinction between his art-work and his religious practice; his public-facing oeuvre has a distinctive quality to it, designed to transmit certain concepts, feelings and experiences, but not to reveal the secrets of his faith.[16] Bedia, like Carpentier, fashions himself a translator, a medium between two conceptions of reality, one modern and one traditional, both of which are treated with equal legitimacy by the artist, who, among his many goals, is the recovery of traditional knowledge suppressed and marginalized by the West's colonial legacy.[17] In this regard we witness in Bedia a renewed effort to address and reconcile through artistic representation the divided "creole psyche" that so concerned Carpentier:

> ...voluntarily and by my own intellectual choice, I have decided to become something like an heir to a series of traditions, and that all those traditions, to the extent that they pass through me, I reproduce them in the form of what is known as art, which is common to all humanity.... I think that [native] culture and cultures in general are like options that exist on a parallel level...and that the advantages that Western culture may offer come with disadvantages that these people understand and have resolved very well in their cultures. So, there is a deficit in each one, none is complete, knowledge is distributed, everything is fragmented and more so now than ever. And I'm like putting all that stuff together and constructing something new.[18]

It is possible to approach the four artworks included in the exhibition *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* from the optic of Carpentier's *barroco*, despite their many understandable differences. For one, there is in Bedia a narrative and symbolic density that recalls the fractal ornamentation of the baroque, an overabundance of images that seem to proliferate with each viewing, an iterative iconography at different scales within and across the works, which, though dominated by the central figure of Makandal, nonetheless resist any sense of complacent symmetry. These are images in motion, and despite their flatness, they pulsate with kinetic energy. As a young boy, Bedia's artistic vocation was oriented toward comics (*muñequitos* in Cuban dialect), and he still considers drawing as the foundation of his approach to art.[19] His ability to create striking iconography, his use of words and labels, and the narrative density of his compositions reflect that early interest and facilitate the didactic impulse in his work. Like Carpentier, Bedia desires to make the "marvelous"—the Other—*legible* to a public unacquainted with non-Western cultures and value systems, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but as a moral imperative to reconcile humanity with itself.[20] This is not to say that his works are simple or sententious—quite the contrary—, but neither are they esoteric or opaque. As

16 Juan Martínez, "Oral History Interview with José Bedia," *Smithsonian Archive of American Art* (February 13, 1998).

17 "[My art] is an attempt at communication and communion between the material and spiritual universe of 'modern' man and 'primitive' man." Cited in Hernández, "José Bedia: Introduction to a Cosmography," 25.

18 "The original reads: "...yo voluntariamente por decisión propia intelectual me he decidido convertirme en como el heredero de una serie de tradiciones, y que todas esas tradiciones en la medida que pasen por mí yo las voy devolviendo en forma de lo que se conoce como arte y es común en toda la humanidad.... Yo pienso que la cultura y las culturas en general es como una especie de opciones que tú tienes a este nivel paralelo...y que las ventajas que puede tener la cultura occidental las tiene de desventajas de cosas que esta gente las tiene muy bien ubicadas y muy completadas en su cultura. Entonces hay como déficit de cada una, ninguna es completa, el saber está repartido, todo está fragmentado y más ahora que nunca. Y yo estoy como uniendo toda esa pedacería y componiendo una cosa nueva." ("Oral History").

Orlando Hernández has written, "Bedia's art is complex, but not complicated." Beyond the powerful emotional effect elicited by his images, Bedia provides clues—signposts, if you will—that, if pursued, direct the viewer toward deeper mysteries and insights, and most importantly, toward a critical re-evaluation of one's own values and the tragic and destructive legacy of Western hegemony. His work is an invitation to a much more profound experience beyond the painted surface.

However, unlike Carpentier, who "discovers" the marvelous real in the salons of Parisian Surrealists and on a guided tour of Haiti, and whose approach to its representation is steeped in the language and tastes of High Modernism, Bedia has chosen to spend his life immersing himself in the traditional cultures he wishes to understand and represent. In this way, Bedia inverts the gesture initiated by Carpentier. Carpentier utilizes the historical novel, that is, a Western narrative device rooted in a chronological and rational understanding of events, and then subverts it through the insertion of non-Western elements treated as equally valid and plausible, and not as exotic or "fantastic" imaginings. Bedia, on the other hand, takes as his point of departure the perspective of the enslaved Africans who are the real protagonists of the story, and who, from within their traditional (or non-Western) understanding of events, nonetheless overthrew the French regime and brought about the Haitian Revolution, an event of great historical significance. We could say that for Bedia the point of departure, the mimetic anchor so to speak, is not the "real," but the "marvelous" itself:

> ...my intentions go beyond that cold recognition through a glass pane or looking at things through a wall; no, I am on the other side of the wall, or rather, I was there and I saw those things and I am rescuing them, or trying to rescue them, on a visual level; I am particularly iconic, visual, content-oriented, of that which has been revealed to me.[21]

[19] Bedia, "Oral History."

[20] "Yo personalmente pienso que mi trabajo es excepcionalmente contenidista y que quiere ser didáctico con toda intención." [Trans: *Personally, I think my work is exceptionally content-driven and has every intention of being didactic.*] See Bedia,"Oral History."

With this in mind, we can begin to see points of convergence and divergence in the representation of the so-called "marvelous" through Bedia's stunning *reimagining* of Carpentier's seminal novel.

Makandal is the dominant figure in the four numbered works included in the exhibition, rendered in black ink on *amate* (a paper developed in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica), with the exception of an early version of *Wayom Lemond* done in wax crayon. The stylized, abstracted body of Makandal is shaped and inscribed with key narrative episodes from the novel: the mutilated arm, lost in the cane press of Lenormand de Mézy's sugar mill; the other arm engaged in the *travail mystique*, or mystical work of preparing his fatal potions, or wielding a large machete or a wooden staff (*palo*) of great power. His torso and limbs are inscribed with the *vévé* or *firmas* by which practitioners of Vodou (and Palo Monte) identify and conjure gods and spirits, and the proliferation of his animal manifestations—Makandal as butterfly, cock, dog, goat, bird, lizard, insect—, proliferate throughout the empty spaces of the compositions. There is a simultaneity and semantic overdetermination in Bedia's treatment of Makandal not unlike that found in Carpentier's prose. For example, *Wayom Lemond* #3 depicts a slave ship that is *also* an embodiment of Makandal: its bow is *also* Makandal's arm wielding a large machete, its stern is *also* the mutilated stump of his left arm, upon which the recurring image of Bouckman in Bois Caiman invoking the fury of the great warrior god Ogún at the foot of the *poto mitan* appears. The three masts of the ship are *also* three animal manifestations of Makandal—the dog, the cock and the goat—, and the ship itself is a *nganga*, or *prenda*, the sacred receptacle which contains, in addition to the skull from which it derives much of its power, the African captives who bring with them the spiritual power to defeat their captors. This sea crossing is overseen by the *lwa* or god of the crossroads, Papa Legba, whose small, horned figure peers out from the otherwise deserted deck, while the *lwa* of the sea itself, Agwé, follows the ship through the Middle Passage in the form of a siren.

[21] The original reads: "...mis intenciones van más allá de ese reconocimiento frío a través de un cristal o de mirar las cosas a través de un muro; no, yo estoy del otro lado del muro, o, estuve allí y vi esas cosas y yo estoy rescatando lo que yo pienso que es rescatar a nivel plástico, visual; yo soy especialmente icónico, visual, contenidista, de eso que a mí se me reveló." See Bedia, "Oral History."

It is worth noting that none of the French characters in the novel are represented in the series, and insofar as they appear at all, it is through their artifacts of oppression. Instead, there are a number of important stylized icons that Bedia includes in all four works: Makandal tied to the pyre in the moment he transforms into a wasp and escapes death, surrounded by the silhouettes of French soldiers who look on and the enslaved masses chanting *Makandal suavé* ("Makandal is saved"). Second, the repeated silhouette of the Jamaican *houngan*, or Vodou priest, Bouckman, whose ceremony at Bois Caiman in 1791 is largely credited with unleashing the revolt that initiated the Haitian Revolution, an event retold in Part Two of Carpentier's novel. Third, the sacred receptacle, the *nganga*, labeled *Petwo* in reference to those gods viewed as more volatile and dangerous within the Vodou pantheon. Fourth, the *poto mitan*, or central pole, a key component in all Vodou rituals, an embodiment of Papa Legba which serves as the conduit between the

José Bedia
Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World), 2023
Mixed media on amate paper
© 2024 José Bedia

divine realm and humankind, and through which the gods may descend upon the Earth, and at whose base Bouckman invokes the god of war through animal sacrifice.

It is far outside the scope of this essay to enter into a detailed explanation of the symbology and history of Vodou, Palo Monte, and other African syncretic religions of the Caribbean.[22] The objective has merely been to show how the utilization of these elements in the *Wayom Lemond* series is not incompatible with Carpentier's earlier attempts at capturing—in the literary language of Modernism—forces and practices historically excluded from Western culture, and to reorient their inclusion as an essential part of the human experience. Ultimately, both Carpentier's novel and Bedia's visual reimagining of it are artworks capable of communicating the "marvelous" in powerful and lasting ways. Nevertheless, the originality and power of Bedia's iconography, the stunning proliferation of referentialities and symbols that expand and enrich the narrated world of the novel, resist our meager attempts to domesticate the images and explain them rationally. These works, for their size, for their composition, for the overpowering force and presence they project, are awe-inspiring, that is, capable of provoking an ecstatic reaction; they are "marvelous." We are paralyzed by Makandal's stare, we are absorbed and frozen in place by his presence.[23] Faced with these images, we find ourselves not outside the Other, as in Carpentier's masterful prose, but inside, witnessing the events of the novel from a perspective that is not our own, but one that transmits to us the possibility of a different way of seeing and of being.

Carpentier, like those of his generation, was preoccupied with defining and representing a unique Latin American identity that was both integrated and distinct from the Western-dominated world order. Bedia's ambition is greater than that. It is not a manifestation of *latinoamericanismo*, it may not be "Latin American" at all, but rather the fertile exploration of a much older form of identity, one that predates the colonial era and the global dominance of Western culture, one that frees us of the endless, stale categories of Rationalism, one that echoes the sentiment expressed by

[22] There are numerous authoritative resources for exploring these topics. For Cuban syncretic religions see Jorge Castellanos and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura afrocubana. Vol. 3: Las religiones y las lenguas* (Miami: Ed. Universal, 1988). For Haiti see Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

Carpentier in the epigraph to this essay, one that returns to us a taste of the transcendent:

> This universalism, or rather, pan-humanism proclaimed in José Bedia's work is the result of his attempt at synthesis, union and fusion of elements from the most diverse geographic, historical and cultural points of the planet, which he has come into contact with not just through the studio, but through his own personal experience.[24]

In *Wayom Lemond* and throughout his vast oeuvre, Bedia returns to those willing to engage with his work in good faith the possibility of an encounter with the sublime Other, and a means of transit between the Kingdoms of Both Worlds.

[23] Bedia's explanation of his unique compositional approach is interesting in this regard: "This is the Chinese perspective view. The point of focus in Renaissance perspective is the horizon point. With Chinese perspective, the point is behind the spectator, so you are surrounded by the work. When I was in art school, I felt a contradiction between myself and the Western tradition they wanted to teach me. For me it was a trick, false like a window to the exterior world. So I wanted to do this in reverse. It took me a while to find a solution in other cultures like the Chinese or like the primitive people." See Sherry Gaché, "José Bedia: Only the Most Valuable Things," *Sculpture* 18, no. 5 (June 1999), 42-49

[24] Hernández, "Introduction to a Cosmography," 17.

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Leah Gordon
Still from *Sitadèl la / Yon Ante,* 2019
Camerawork on 8mm colour negative film
Acting and Singing by Jean Claude Saintilus
Recorder by anonymous musician on the path to the Citadelle Laferrière
© 2024 Leah Gordon

Shaping The Kingdom of this World in the Mother of All Lands: Visual Sovereignty in Haiti under Epochal Ungovernance

(a cursory overview of a selection of works commissioned and produced for *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*)

Claire Tancons

...and so he hops and hobbles his way down the cobbles, no stones...the cobbles, no stones, this is no city this is country... this is no city this is country, no tame sidewalk but wanting fortress...no lame sidewalk but wanton fortress...which city could it be, which country could it be...which city could it be which country could it not be...no country but land, inland and island, mother of all lands...

He erupts into the midtopic landscape[1] of conic cannonball stockpiles against a mountainous and maritime landscape that has become emblematic of Sitadèl, King Henry Christophe's deferred fantasy for unfulfilled warfare with the French. A ship crowns his head atop a straw hat complementing the military jacket of this captain-peasant, lone wanderer in a tropical vagabondiana of British memory[2] and mayhap Trinidadian make, reminiscent as it is of that island's Fancy Sailor carnival character, replete with a beggar's cane in lieu of a sailor's stoker...[3]

As he enters the Citadelle and furthers his precarious motion downhill through steep stairs, with the swager of the crutch and the cane, all-too knowing of the crippling life and cruel landscape, he sings his redemption:

Ayiti Cheri
Pi bon peyi pase ou nan pwen
Fòk mwen te kite w'
Pou mwen te kapab
Konprann valè'w
Fòk mwen te kite w'
Pou mwenm te kap apresye w'
Pou m'santi vrèman
Tout sa ou te yep ou mwen

Gen bon solèy
Bon rivyè e bel brevaj
Anba pye bwa
Na toujou jwenn bon lonbraj
Anba pye bwa
Na toujou jwenn bel fréchè
m'santi vrèman
Tout sa ou te yep ou mwen[4]

[1] From my essay "Midtopic Mysteries: An Ambulatory Museum Theory," published in *Open Space*, SFMoMA's online journal, https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2016/05/disembodied-states-midtopic-mysteries/. I had already borrowed the notion of midtopia to Ellen C. Caldwell in "Myth, Midtopia, and Mapping: Frohawk Two Feathers and the Making of the Frenglish Empire," in *Frohawk Two Feathers, You Can Fall*, exhibition catalogue for the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey and Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art, published August 2013 to account for the historical demise of the postcolonial and the enduring promise of the imagination in setting forth Afro-diasporic futures. https://issuu.com/artcenternj/docs/frohawk_two_feathers_-_you_can_fall/16.

Leah Gordon
Vagabondaj Mawon: Sitadel, 2019
Fibre-based photographic print from medium format black-and-white negative, hand-tinted, scanned and printed as giclee print mounted on aluminum dibond
© 2024 Leah Gordon

In the work of British-born and honorary Haitian artist Leah Gordon's *Wayòm nan Mond Sa-a | The Kingdom of this World* (2019) series, the figure appears in the Super-8 video *Sitadèl* as well as in the photograph *Vagabondaj Mawon: Sitadel* (2019) from a triptych in which he is flanked with a British homologue set against the Welch foundry factory of Blaenavon in a linguistic and visual English translation as *Maroon Vagabondage: Blaenavon* (2019). Together both limping runaways, re-embodied members of the Atlantic motley crew, frame a rendition of the Three Graces trope rescued from classical eternity with the depiction of an aged Europe surrounded by her traditional but still gracile faire-

valoir of Africa and America in *Europe Supported by Africa and the Americas: A Prophesy* (2014).

We are at the confluence of modern history between the British Isles and the Caribbean islands the former once sought to govern alongside or against fellow Enlightened European despots, including the French. We are in Haiti, on the great island of Quisqueya ("mother of all lands" in Taíno), shared with the Dominican Republic. We are also in *The Kingdom of This World,* the book written by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in 1949 and the eponymous exhibition, *The Kingdom of this World, Reimagined*, envisioned for the seventy-year anniversary of the book (1949-2019), by curator Lesley A. Wolff for audiences in Florida, the southernmost American peninsular proximate with Caribbean archipelagic sensibilities.

I am looking at the works from France, the colonial empire who extended its dominion over Haïti, as a native of Guadeloupe, a former sugar island and current French department, still in the grips of colonialism and currently under one of its periodic turmoil of governance provoked by a refusal of Covid vaccination by a small but solid minority of Guadeloupeans. I am thinking against the historical framework of the French and Haïtian revolutions, trying to apprehend this era's own brand of *lo real maravilloso* beyond literature, between the reign of Haïti's first monarch and the murder of its last president, and the murder of France's last monarch and the fin de règne of its sitting regalian president. I am thinking about Susan-Buck Morss' *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (2009), Yarimar Bonilla's *Non-Sovereign Futures* (2015) and David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004), Aimé Césaire *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* (1963) and C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938) as well as, reading in French, for the first time, *Le Royaume de ce monde*, alongside Emmelie Prophète's *Les villages de Dieu* (2021). As I cope with the critical task of inhabiting a Black French consciousness today, it strikes me that the artists in *The Kingdom of this World*, having set their sights on specific episodes from the novel, and generally rendered the aura of *lo maravilloso* in myriad ways, are wrestling with

[2] Vagabondiana is a direct reference to Leah Gordon's replication of an illustration of an injured Black British former sailor from John Thomas Smith's [1817] book, *Vagabondiana.* In Gordon's dual rendition of a black and a white sailor figure, the context of Whitechapel's streets where Smith's beggar is depicted is replaced by Citadelle in the case of the former, in echo of the plight of *The Kingdom of the World*'s main protagonist Ti Noël, and by a nineteenth-century iron foundry in the case of the latter, in a tour de force of proletarian transatlantic imagery on par with depictions such as can be found in Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

[3] The Fancy Sailor is a traditional mas character from the Trinidad Carnival said to date back to the British, French and American naval presence in the island in the late nineteenth century. His fantasy sailor costume is usually outfitted with a stocker which resembles and is used like a cane, especially by the masquerade's typically older mas (wo)men.

forms of visual sovereignty no less sophisticated than these Caribbean writers and critics are striving to dismantle the by now misguided myth of emancipatory politics. At a time when countries like Haïti can no longer be thought of in terms of ungovernability but of ungovernance—the active dismantling of the very notion of governance, rather than the circumstantial underperformance of government—in keeping with early-onset occurrences of post-revolutionary maladies that have affected its direct and indirect colonial undertakers.[5]

Owing to the trauma of Makandal's accidental loss of one arm at the sugar mill and tragic death at the stake, a central episode in Carpentier's novel, counter-imagery offering visual remedies to the maimed body runs throughout the artists' works in the exhibition. From Simryn Gill's succinct summary of the novel into a necklace of beads rolled from its pages to José Bedia's rebus-like concatenation of its most salient episode and Edouard Duval-Carrié full divulgation of its secrets, no adornment can be intricate or precious enough to remedy the dismemberment of his body and (his) story.

Simryn Gill's necklace of paper beads, carries its material entitlement to bodily adornment of utmost value in its metonymic title *Pearls…* (*Pearls: Alejo Carpentier, The Kingdom of This World, translated by Harriet de Onis. 1975 (reprint 1980) Harmondsworth, Penguin*, 2019), salvaging the metempsychotic memory of the historical body expanded in the void around it as lack in excess.

José Bedia's *Wayom Lemond* (*The Kingdom of This World*), 2021, bejewels the visual representation of Makandal's body in white *vévés* etched into his chalkboard Black skin against a gold background befitting a king, elevating the animals into which Makandal transformed into icons of his sovereignty over the spiritual realm he inhabited as *lizard*, *kabritt*, *papillon*, *kok* and *chyen*, between the *lwas* to whom he sacrificed more than *kochon*, but himself entirely. The resulting effect is that of a roadmap to self-governance over one's body through the myriad detours one can take

[4] In Leah Gordon's *Wayòm nan Mond Sa-a | The Kingdom of this World* (2019), the character with the ship headpiece sings his own truncated, idiosyncratic version of the song which I transcribed in the body of the essay. Its lyrics differ slightly from the song's original as written by Othello Bayard in 1925. A translation of the film's version could be:

> Haiti, my beloved, no other land is more beautiful than you
>
> I had to leave you, in order to better understand how valuable you are
>
> I had to leave you, for me to appreciate you
>
> So I could truly feel all that you were for me
>
> There is sunshine, nice rivers and great drinks
>
> Underneath the trees, you'll always find great shade
>
> Underneath the trees, you'll find some cool
>
> So I could truly feel all that you were for me.

[5] I discovered the notion of ungovernance as I started to perceive the inadequacy of the older notion of ungovernability. As described by Deval Desai and Andrew Lang, ungovernance operates within the gaps of (un-) governability and "function[s] to facilitate collective action by diverse groups of stakeholders within these particular and contentious institution-building projects." This in turns strikes me as bearing resemblance with Yarimar Bonilla's description of power struggles for governance in non-sovereign overseas territories of France such as Guadeloupe. Deval Desai and Andrew Lang "Introduction: global un-governance," *Transnational Legal Theory* 11, no. 3 (2020): 219-243.

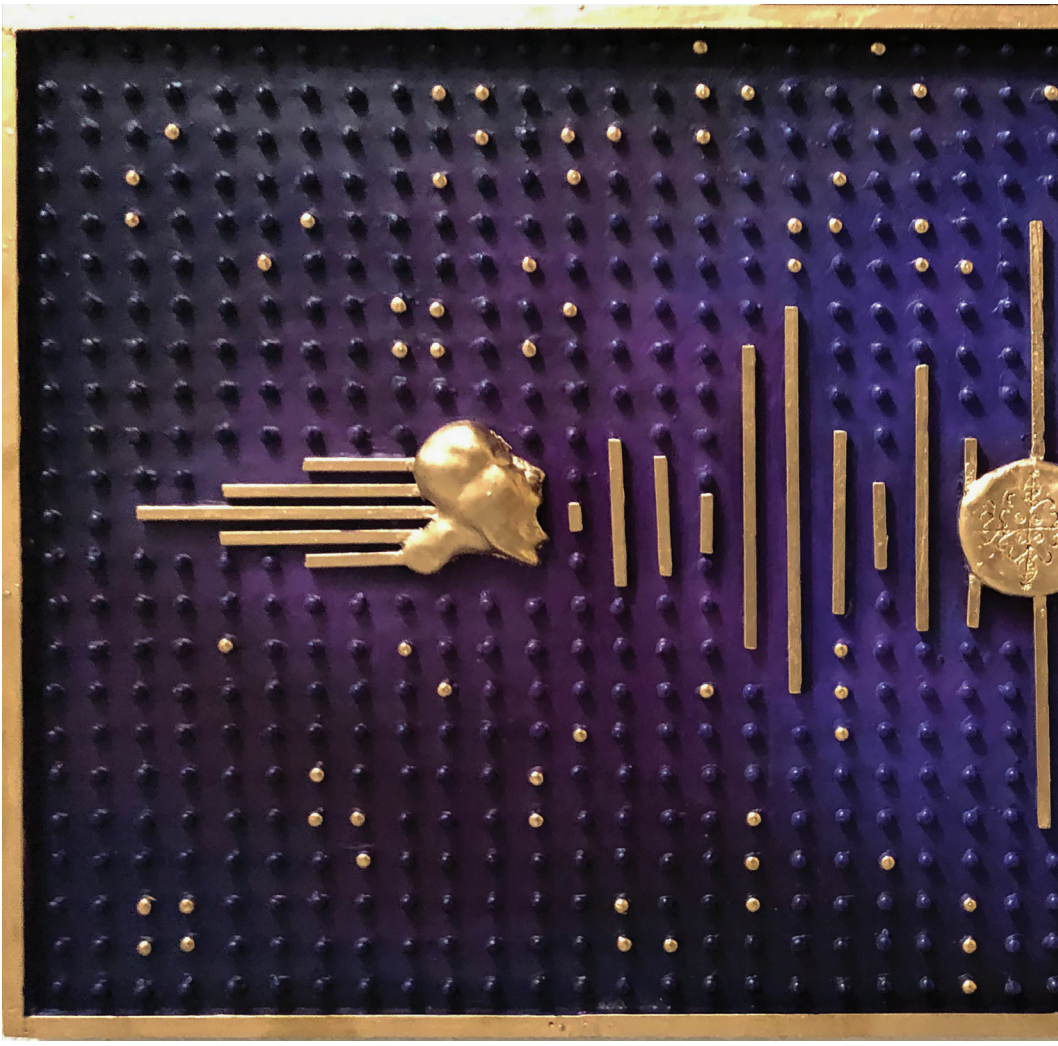
in avoiding subjection through transmutation into species undetectable to political witchcraft—to a point, a point of retour. In Makandal's final flight to freedom rendered in the smallest of *saynètes, l'ekzekisyon,* the mosquito is only the vessel through which his spirit can evade annihilation, to reincarnate into the large body of mystical might apportioned in size within the frame of the work to its place in the contemporary Haïtian radical imagination, at the crossroads of powerful myths of redemptive returns.

Likewise bejeweled are the pages/plates of Edouard Duval-Carrié's artist book with their generous preciosity calling to mind the refinement of eighteenth-century French decorative arts, summoning the finesse of *camées* and the lushness of enamels. The white-colored drawings, bidimensional visual reliefs emerging from their nightly blue-black background, in all their unabashed decorativeness, act as much as a remedy against the violence of representation, as it does a fresh forward throwback to the age preceding the bling fashion favored by a younger generation of Caribbean and Afro-diasporic artists seeking similar effects of affirmation.

Maybe still, even greater dominion over the codes of representation of Haïtian history, through the heroic body of one of its iconic protagonists, is achieved by Dudley Alexis with an economy of means belying an equally precious approach to visual embezzlement, through a sort of minimalist baroque. In *Ancestral Sacrifices*, the descending lines of golden blood of the sacrificial pig of the Bois Caïman sarment ceremony are countered by the ascending manes stemming from the edged bottom of the work, while the arresting image of a Christlike representation with an inverted triangle for the body pinned onto the Cross, the head of a *vévé* inserted in a beaming areola, rises. No mosquito there, but could it be… Makandal?

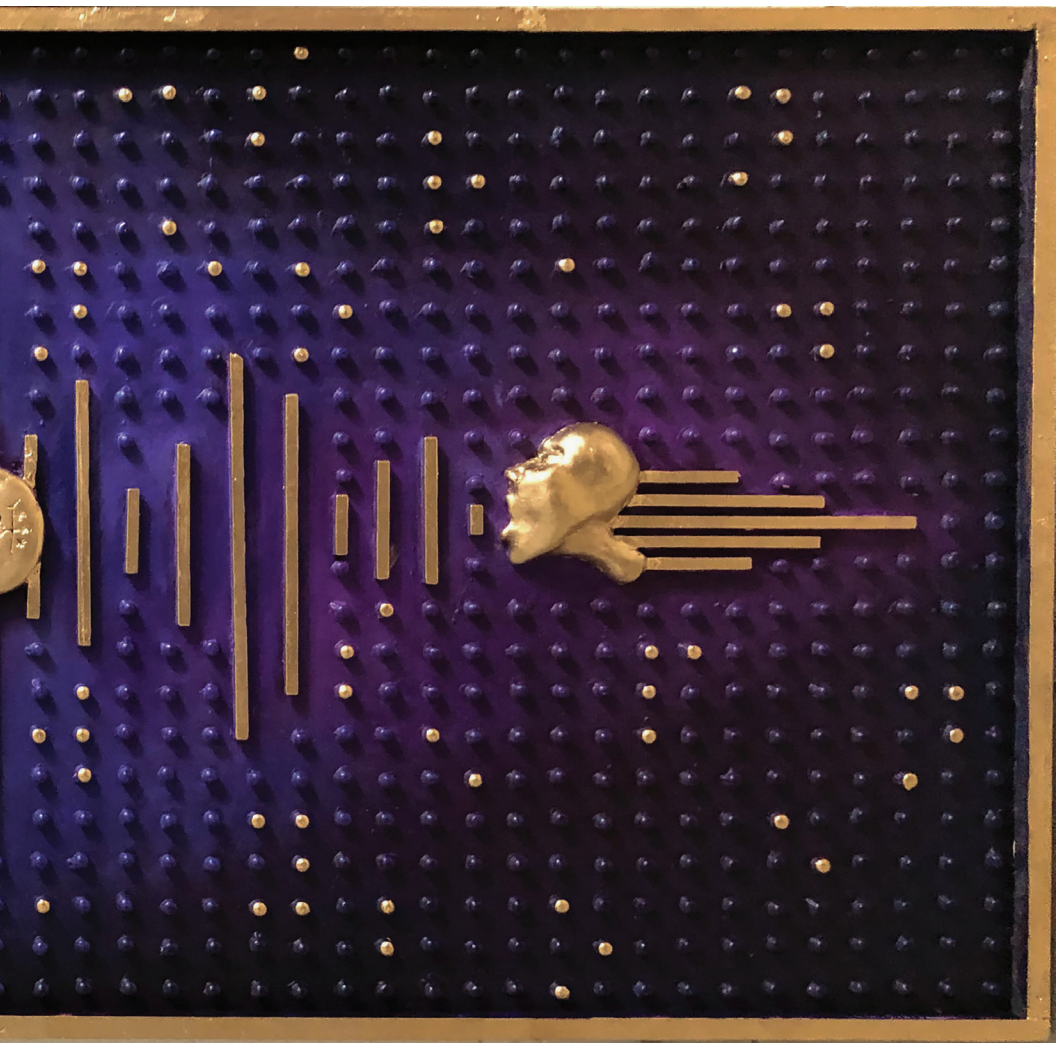
Plates

Roberto Juarez
Vulture Study II, 2019
Acrylic on paper
© 2024 Roberto Juarez



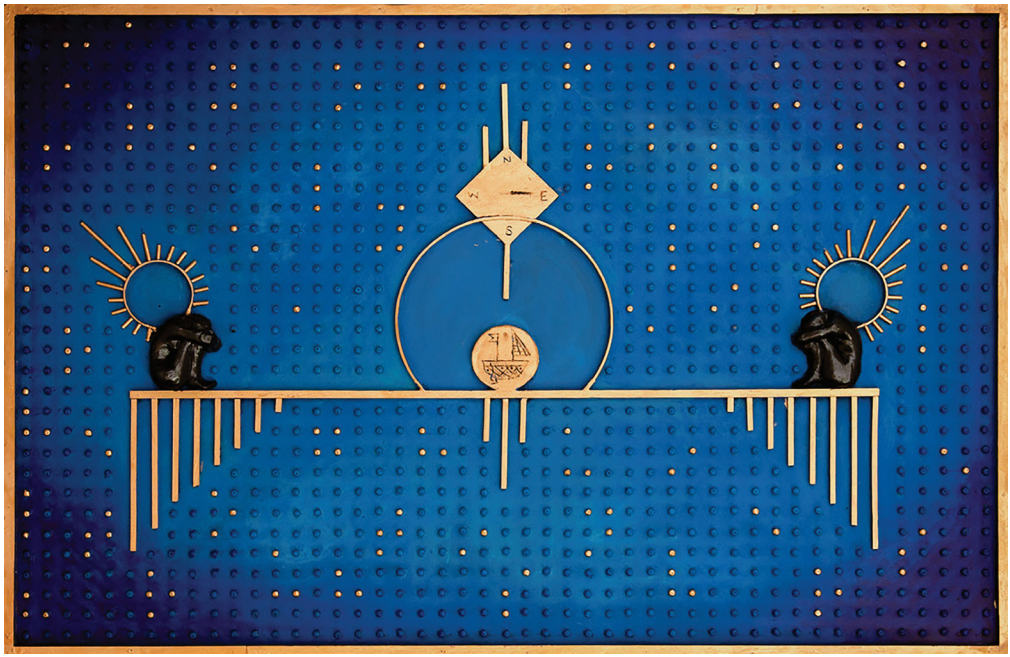
Dudley Alexis
Ancestral Hymns, 2019
Mixed media
© 2024 Dudley Alexis

The *vévé* (a ritual Vodou symbol) at the center references the Vodou deity Papa Legba, the gatekeeper and guardian of the crossroads. Papa Legba's might manifests in Alexis's work as the visualization of sound wave frequencies—an invisible, yet real, physical force that registers the artist's training in film and animation. Alexis's sonic imagery also evokes the call of the conch shell in 1791, which signaled the start of the revolutionary uprising.



Dudley Alexis
Ancestral Sacrifices, 2019
Mixed media
© 2024 Dudley Alexis

Erzulie Dantó, Vodou warrior and protectress, is conjured with her *vévé* at center, an insignia floating amid a sea of red. According to Alexis, the work's saturated hue references both the maternal love of the Vodou deity and the bloody ritual sacrifice of the wild pig during the Bois Caïman Vodou ceremony of August 14, 1791. It was allegedly during this important ceremony that enslaved laborers from across Northern Saint Domingue conspired to rebel against the plantocracy—the kernel of insurrection that would swell into the Haitian Revolution.



Dudley Alexis
Voyage of Ancestral Songs, 2021
Mixed media
© 2024 Dudley Alexis

The crouched figures that flank the composition symbolize the Americas, at left, and Africa, at right. At center, Alexis depicts the *vévé* for Agwé, Vodou deity of the seas, whose ship with open sails heads eastward toward the ancestral homeland.

Chesley Antoinette
Saint Domingue, 2021/2024
Digital print on satin and mixed media
© 2024 Chesley Antoinette

Antoinette's work in the soft sculptural medium of the *tignon*—a Creole headwrap historically worn by Afro-descendent women in the Spanish and French Caribbean and Southern US—draws attention to the politics of hair in the colonial Americas. Antoinette uses this monumental form to reference the racialized and gendered histories of plantation economies that bolstered the wealth of European empires. References to indigo, sugar, and coffee, some of the French empire's most lucrative plantation crops, adorn the oversized cloth of Antoinette's *tignon*. The embroidery on satin that hangs behind the *tignon* contains passages from the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. The document proclaims rights to "liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression" for French citizens, which exclusively included male property owners at the time. This declaration of freedom erases the individuals who continued to live under French exploitation and enslavement in the colonies; their "resistance to oppression" not a right guaranteed, but nonetheless a necessity for survival.

Chesley Antoinette
Sans Luis La Nuit & Gota, 2018
Inkjet print on cotton paper with archival pigment
© 2024 Chesley Antoinette

This photograph grapples with economic and social mobility amid the complex landscape of the eighteenth-century Americas, when revolutionary politics saw great shifts in European influence across the hemisphere. The work's title, *Sans Luis La Nuit & Gota*, refers to a trading company run by freed Black men and women in late eighteenth-century New Orleans, while the presence of the *tignon*—a headwrap mandated by the Spanish government to be worn by women of color—illuminates the pernicious nature of racial oppression in the region. The composition also recalls the work of Italian painter Agostino Brunias, whose late eighteenth-century dulcet depictions of freed women of color in the Caribbean were widely circulated in Europe during this period.

Agostino Brunias
Free Women of Color with Their Children and Servants in a Landscape, ca. 1770–1796
Oil on canvas
20 x 26 1/8 in. (50.8 x 66.4 cm)
Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Mrs. Carll H. de Silver in memory of her husband, by exchange and gift of George S. Hellman, by exchange, 2010.59

José Bedia
Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World), 2019
Mixed media on amate paper
© 2024 José Bedia

In response to this exhibition, Bedia produced a series of works rendered a series of works rendered on amate (handmade paper of compressed tree bark) that explore the folklore of Makandal—the real-life Maroon leader who helped to incite early revolts that would lead to the Haitian Revolution. Bedia portrays Makandal in various guises, human and non, as he has been envisioned in Haitian collective memory and in Carpentier's novel. In this work, the first of the series, the *vévé* for Legba is inscribed on Makandal's chest at center, aligning him with the Vodou intercessor between humans and deities. The absence of Makandal's left arm is particularly pronounced, a reminder of the sugar mill accident that took his limb. For Bedia, Makandal's phantom limb signifies his transcendent power. By sacrificing a part of his physical being, Makandal finds new, subversive ways of being in the world.

grande BRIGITTE
Ogoun BALAGRI
Ogoun FERÉ
Ogoun NÈGRE
MACKANDAL PAPILLON
TRAVAIL MYSTIQUE
LE BACA
MACKANDAL-CHIEN NIWA
MACKANDAL-KABRIT

José Bedia
Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World), 2021
Mixed media on amate paper
© 2024 José Bedia

At center, a large cross symbolizes the Vodou deity known as Gede, who oversees the forces of death, transformation, and rebirth that Bedia represents throughout the composition. At far right, Bedia invokes the pivotal moment of the wild pig sacrifice during the Bois Caïman ceremony, which marked the historical beginnings of the Haitian Revolution. Bedia splatters the pig's spilt blood across the composition, marking the work with the viscera of the creative process (ink) and revolution (blood) alike.

grands Brizette
Kok mackandal
Krapo
Pétro
mutilasyon
Criminelle
Baron Samedi
mackandal-chyen nwa
mackandal
bateau
IWA AYIWE
perseverance
LA SIRENE
lemond *

José Bedia
Wayom Lemond (The Kingdom of This World), 2023
Mixed media on amate paper
© 2024 José Bedia

In the final iteration of this series, Bedia depicts three animalistic guises of Makandal (dog, rooster, and goat) that together form the sails of a ship. Makandal's ability to evade capture by transforming into other beings is both a centerpiece of *The Kingdom of This World* and a persistent belief in Haitian lore. Here, Makandal leads the masses with the help of Agwé, the Vodou deity of the seas, known to provide guidance in times of peril.

mackandal kabrit
mackandal fok
pòt mitan
Lemond
SIK
SAN

Edouard Duval-Carrié
Installation view of select works from *The Kingdom of This World* series, 2017
Framed etchings on Plexiglas
© 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Duval-Carrié richly illustrates a series of scenes inspired by passages from Alejo Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of This World*. The scenes (fifteen in the series) unfold in narrative fashion, providing opulent windows into the pivotal years of the Haitian Revolution, when the emergent nation sought to liberate itself from French colonial rule. Duval-Carrié uses the ornamental flourishes of eighteenth-century French Rococo to draw attention to the connections between colonial-era wealth, enslaved labor, and the cultural memories emergent therein. Each Plexiglas plate creates the illusion of a blue abyss, in which the "floating" images evoke the perilous sea as both a violent agent and creative progenitor of Caribbean history.

Edouard Duval-Carrié
Metamorphose #3, 2017
Etching on Plexiglas in Artist Frame
© 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Scherezade García
Framing Las Americas I, 2022
Archival inkjet print, acrylic and charcoal on canvas
© 2024 Scherezade García

García's work seeks to "colonize the colonizer," using the visual tools of imperialism to subvert the Western canon of art history and its relationship to harmful systems of power. In these works, García troubles the Eurocentric notion of framing, which has long been used to privilege certain subjects and hide others. The regal Black figures at center are surrounded by motifs that evoke the tropics—bright colors, ocean waves—and overtake the gold frames at back. These canvases deliberately hang loose, unframed, to further underscore the porous nature of Caribbean history as intertwined with our collective global humanity.

Scherezade García
Framing Las Americas II, 2022
Archival inkjet print, acrylic and charcoal on canvas
© 2024 Scherezade García

William Vázquez and Scherezade García
Petit Prince del Caribe, 2015
Digital print on aluminum
© 2024 William Vázquez and Scherezade García

This collaborative work demonstrates the layered identities that comprise Caribbean history. Set on an idyllic beach in the Dominican Republic, the photo taken by the husband-and-wife team of Vázquez and García constructs a scene out of time with a young boy outfitted as a revolutionary leader. Through imaginative and uncanny staging, everyday materials evoke an extraordinary past. The boy's crushed can becomes a medallion, a straw hat with a palm frond transforms into a naval bicorn topped with a plumed feather, and the donkey becomes a powerful steed.

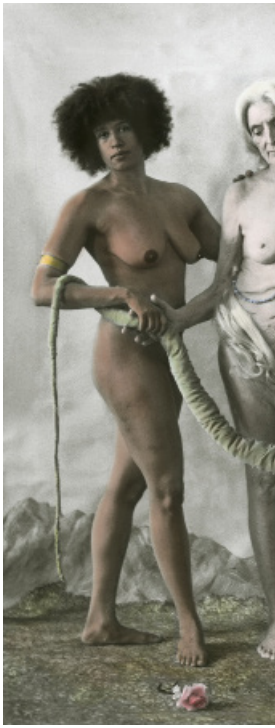
Simryn Gill
Pearls: Alejo Carpentier, The Kingdom of This World, translated by Harriet de Onis. 1975 (reprint 1980) Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2019
Paper, glue, string
© 2024 Simryn Gill

Part of the artist's ongoing series of works known as *Pearls* (2000 —), this beaded necklace embodies the performativity of gift exchange. The artist Leah Gordon, whose work is included in this catalogue, gifted her copy of *The Kingdom of This World* to Gill, who then reciprocated the gesture with the beaded necklace rendered from the book's pages. This transformative act challenges conventional notions of value, authenticity, and authority, concepts that resonate with the themes of revolution and power embedded in Carpentier's book. Like an alchemist, Gill shifts the object's initial value, from a prized text to its new significance as a commodity to be worn, the meaning of the words deconstructed and reimagined.

José García Cordero
Makandal Transforming into Butterflies, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Lyle Reitzel Gallery
© 2024 José García Cordero

This portrait of Makandal is part of a series of neo-gothic studies García Cordero produced of the mytho-historical figure, highlighting Makandal's crucible of trials and triumphs that persist in Haitian collective memory. As Makandal simmers in a fiery cauldron, he begins his transformation into Pierid butterflies–a species common to the Caribbean that is known for its camouflage amid the lush foliage of the islands.

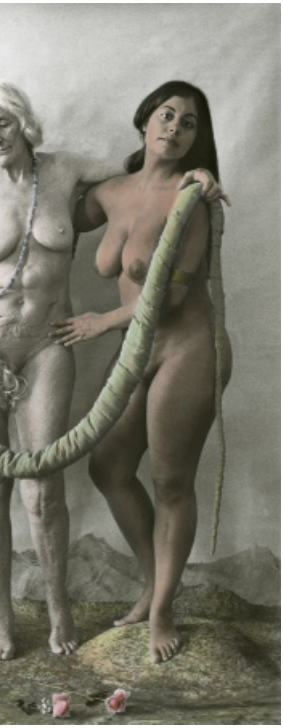
José García Cordero
Study for Bust of Makandal, 2021
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Lyle Reitzel Gallery
© 2024 José García Cordero



Leah Gordon
Wayóm nan Mond sa a: Vagabondaj Mawon (Kingdom of This World: Maroon Vagabondage), 2019
Fibre-based photographic prints from medium format black-and-white negatives, hand-tinted, scanned and printed as giclee prints mounted on aluminum dibond
© 2024 Leah Gordon

In this monumental triptych, Gordon critiques the extractive machinations of globalization. Her hand-tinted technique renders the figures as phantoms conjured to recall how transatlantic colonization binds us to one another even today. Gordon's work focuses on those who find ways to persist outside of dominant systems, such as the figure of the "vagabond," depicted in the right and left panels. For Gordon, these figures offer transatlantic connections between the *vagabondage* of Victorian London and the *maroonage* communities of enslaved Africans—like Makandal and Ti Noël—who fled the plantation to seek a sovereign life within the mountainous inland terrain of Saint Domingue. These compositions are based on 19th century lithographs of the Black British "King of the Beggars," Joseph Johnson, who Gordon has transported from London's docks to the 19th century Haitian Citadelle Laferrière (at left), and the Welsh ironworks site of Blaenavon (at right).

These outsiders are anchored by a figural grouping at center that re-imagines William Blake's 1796 allegorical engraving of Europe supported by Africa and the Americas—an abolitionist commentary on the treacheries of colonization. Unlike the youthful and exuberant figures in Blake's composition, Gordon depicts Europe as an aged woman, withered from centuries of dependency on the people, land, and labors of Africa and the Americas.



William Blake
Europe Supported by Africa and America, 1796
Engraving

John Thomas Smith
Illustration of "Joseph Johnson" from *Vagabondiana, or, Anecdotes of mendicant wanderers through the streets of London: with portraits of the most remarkable, drawn from the life,* 1815
Engraving

Roberto Juarez
Vulture Clock, 2019
Acrylic and crayon on canvas
© 2024 Roberto Juarez

Juarez first produced work in response to *The Kingdom of This World* in the 1980s, illustrating a limited-edition printing of the book with Peter Pettengill. Three decades later, Juarez revisited Carpentier's text to produce a new series of paintings and studies, which showcase the same thematic elements on different stylistic terms. The vultures that populate these works eerily recall the final lines of *The Kingdom of This World*, in which Carpentier suggests that the vulture—a symbol of death as well as re-birth—may have been the only witness to Ti Noël's departure from his mortal body.

Maggie Steber
Haitian Boy (Ti Noël/Ti jou d'lan), 2019
Digital inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Fine Art Paper
© 2024 Maggie Steber

This captivating portrait of a young Haitian boy draped in white cloth calls attention to the tender age at which Ti Noël would have been taken from his African homeland and brought to colonial Saint Domingue as an enslaved laborer. Steber has manipulated and stylized the contemporary image to appear aged with the young boy's resolute gaze fading in and out of focus. The white linen draped around his body recalls the innocent, joyful tradition of the *ti jou d'lan*, an annual procession of Haitian children dressed in their finest clothes who ring in the New Year—Haiti's Day of Independence—with wishes for *Bonne et Heuresue Année* [Happy New Year] to their loved ones throughout the community.

Contributor Biographies

Dudley Alexis is an independent filmmaker and visual artist. Dudley Alexis uses anthropological and historical analysis to see his world through unique multicultural eyes. His mission as a Creative is to mine the wealth of hidden details that provide meaning to the lives of those often written off by the mainstream and finding in their stories. His gift is in gaining the trust of others who then poignantly share their personal stories, often filled with tragedy and triumph. Alexis vividly portrays their drive to thrive and to live with dignity and equality in a world that would too often attempt to keep them marginalized.

Born in Haiti, Alexis immigrated to the United States in his teens, attending high school and graduating from the Art Institutes, Miami International University of Art & Design, where he studied Multimedia and Fine art. His body of work includes a vast number of short documentaries, including stories about the First Nation Miccosukee Tribe of Florida, made while employed by Miccosukee Magazine.

He went on to write, film, direct and edit his first full-length documentary, "Liberty in a Soup," completed in 2016. "Liberty in a Soup," tells the historical significance of Soup Joumou, the national dish of Haiti, which commemorates the island nation's triumphant independence from France, making it the first independent Black Republic in the Western Hemisphere. Using this feature film, the Haitian delegation at UNESCO submitted Soup Joumou to their World Intangible Cultural Heritage List, and it was officially added to the list in December 2021.

In 2020, Alexis directed "When Liberty Burns," an in-depth analysis of the 40th Anniversary of the life and untimely death of Arthur Lee McDuffie at the hands of Miami-Dade police officers. The film won multiple awards, including The Film Knight Made in MIA Feature Film Award and The NHdocs Golden Slice for Best Documentary Feature Film. In addition, Dudley Alexis has been nominated for a Suncoast Regional Emmy®Awards for Best Director for Cultural Documentary.

Alexis continues to develop his mastery of multiple mediums. His gift of seemingly endless curiosity and keen insight brings us closer to confronting global issues as part of his ongoing effort to facilitate public awareness and bring societal parity and change wherever needed.

Chesley Antoinette is a native Texan conceptualizing with sustainable practices in forms of sculptural textile installations, wearable art, and curatorial projects. Her current body of work explores 18th century North America and Saint Domingue through turban headwraps and shares the history in forms of art exhibitions, lecture series, and interactive educational workshops. She discovered the process of making art at the local community college, later, transferred to Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches with a B.F.A in Sculpture and completed her formal education in Denton at the University of North Texas with a M.F.A in Fiber Arts. She currently splits her time between Austin and Dallas as an educator and practicing artist, while being passionate towards supporting, sharing, and building the appreciation for the arts with Texas and all of humankind.

José Bedia was an integral part of the 1981 exhibition, *Volumen Uno* at the Havana International Arts Center, which serves as a milestone in the history for visual arts in Cuba, radically transforming Cuban Art. He participated in the first Havana Biennial in 1984, and later was selected to represent Cuba at the Venice Biennale in 1990. Two years later he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in New York.

Important solo exhibitions include *Persistencia del Uso* (Persistence of Use) at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, where he obtained the Grand Prize of the Landscape Salon (1984); *Magiciens de la Terre*, Centre Pompidou (1989); *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias* (A Brief Account of the Indies' Destruction) at the Carrillo Gil Museum of Contemporary Art in Mexico DF (1992); *De donde vengo* (Where I Come From) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (1994); *Cosas Redondas* (Round Things) Fort Lauderdale Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (1995); *Entre dos Mundos* (Between Two Worlds) at the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (IVAM) in Valencia, Spain (2010); and *Transcultural Pilgrim* at the Fowler Museum in UCLA, California (2012). He also participated in the first four editions of the Havana Biennial, where, in 1986, he won the award for Installation for his work *El golpe del tiempo* (The Blow of Time). Bedia's works are part of several collections, including the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana; the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York; the Fogg Museum at Harvard University,

Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Guggenheim Museum in New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC; the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst in Aachen, Germany; and the Perez Art Museum in Miami, Florida, among others.

Marlene L. Daut is Professor of French, Black Studies, and History at Yale University. She is the author of four books, most recently *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution* (UNC Press, 2023), co-winner of the Frederick Douglass Book Prize, and *The First and Last King of Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Henry Christophe* (Knopf, 2025), a finalist for the Cundill History Prize.

Edouard Duval-Carrié is a contemporary artist and curator based in Miami, Florida. Born and raised in Haiti, Duval Carrié fled the regime of "Papa Doc" Duvalier as a teenager and subsequently resided in locales as diverse as Puerto Rico, New York, Montreal, Paris, and Miami. Parallels thus emerge between the artist's cosmopolitan lifestyle and his artistic sensitivity toward the multifaceted identities that form his native Haiti. At heart, Edouard is an educator: he challenges the viewer to make meaning of dense iconography derived from Caribbean history, politics, and religion. His mixed media works and installations present migrations and transformations, often human and spiritual. The conceptual layering of Edouard's works is further emphasized in his materials and through consistent attention to translucent and reflective mediums, such as glitter, glass, and resin. The introspective effects of these mediums transform his works into spatial interventions that implicate the viewer in their historicity. At their most fundamental, Edouard's works ask the viewer to complicate the Western Canon, to consider how Africa has shaped the Americas, and how the Caribbean has shaped the modern world.

Scherezade García is a painter, printmaker, and installation artist whose work often explores allegories of history, migration, collective and ancestral memory, and cultural colonization and politics. A co-founder of the Dominican York Proyecto GRÁFICA, she holds an AAS from Altos de Chavón School of Design, a BFA from Parsons School of Design | The New School, and an MFA from The City College of New York, CUNY. García has been featured in solo and duo exhibitions at the Art Museum of the Americas, Clifford Art Gallery at Colgate University, Miller Theater at Columbia University, Lehman College Art Gallery, Crossroads Gallery at the University of Notre Dame, Museo de Arte de Santo Domingo and others. She has participated in the Havana Biennial, the International Biennial of Paintings at Haute de Cagnes, the IV Caribbean Biennial, Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan, Latin American Biennial, BRIC Biennial, Venice Autonomous Biennial, and international fairs. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Art Museum of the Americas, El Museo del Barrio, The Housatonic Museum of Art, El Museo de Arte Moderno in Santo Domingo, Nasher Museum @ Duke University, Mellon Foundation, Blanton Museum of Art, The Hudson River Museum of Art, LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), Hood Museum of Art @ Dartmouth College, and others.

García is the recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant (2015) and the Colene Brown Art Prize (2020). An edited monograph on her work *Scherezade García: From This Side of the Atlantic*, was published in 2020 by the Art Museum of the Americas, and her new monograph titled *When the Sea is My Land*, was published in 2024 by Praxis. She is a member of the Artist Advisory Council of Arts Connection and No Longer Empty. She sits on the Board of Directors of the College Art Association (2020-2024), and the Board of Women& their work in Austin, TX.

García is represented by Praxis Art Gallery [link: https://www.praxis-art.com/en/artist/scherezade-garcia/ in New York, IBIS Contemporary Art Gallery https://ibisartgallery.com/artist/scherezade-garcia] in New Orleans. Her artist's papers can be found at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. García is an Assistant Professor at The University of Texas @ Austin. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY, and Austin, TX.

José García Cordero was born in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic in 1951. García Cordero has lived and worked in Paris since 1977. He has been based in Montreuil, France, since 1996. He studied painting with the Dominican Master Hernández Ortega. In 1977, running away From Balaguer's dictatorship, he moved to Paris in a voluntary exile, where he studied Contemporary History at the University of Vincennes. Dividing his time between the Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo and Cabarete) and Paris, France, José García Cordero creates large-scale, "double entendre" paintings that reflect both the duality of his personal experience between European and Caribbean culture. Also an eloquent poet/philosopher, this Dominican Republic native is inspired by Latin American authors as much as by universal visual artists. His works are held in numerous prestigious collections and continue to be exhibited internationally.

Amy Bowman-McElhone Ph.D. is Associate Professor in Art History and Curatorial Studies and Director and Curator of the Carlow University Art Gallery, where she served as Program Director of Art (2020-2024) and Chair of the Department of Art, Communication and English (2023-2025) during the development and presentation of *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined*. Her scholarship focuses on contemporary art, care ethics, and maternal feminism, with research examining institutional critique, curatorial practice, and visual culture in the Americas. Her work has appeared in *Arts Journal*, *Social Science Quarterly*, and *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, among other publications. She is a founding member of Apotropaicas Colectiva, a collaborative initiative dedicated to femme-centered art histories of the Americas, and served as Co-Curator and Senior Research Fellow for the Anthropology of Motherhood project (2019-2025). Bowman-McElhone's curatorial work includes *Motherwork* (2025), *Permissible Dose: Erin Mallea* (2024), and *To Hear It With Our Eyes: Activist Voices in the International Poetry Forum* (2022), among numerous other exhibitions exploring social engagement, decolonial perspectives, and contemporary art practice. Prior to her work at Carlow University, she served as Director and Chief Curator of the UWF Pensacola Museum of Art (2017-2019). Her forthcoming article, "Mike Kelley's Speculative Architectures: Rethinking Public Art, Pedagogy, and Memory in the Politics of Social Engagement," will appear in *Arts Journal* in November 2025.

Simryn Gill is an artist working in sculpture, photography, drawing and writing who divides her time between Australia and Malaysia. Select solo and group exhibitions include, *Hugging the Shore*, NTU Center for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2015); *Sites of Reason: A Selection of Recent Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); *Here art grows on trees*, Australian Pavilion, 55th Venice Biennale, Venice (2013); *Lasting Images*, Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); 5*th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art*, Moscow (2013); *dOCUMENTA 13*, Kassel (2012); *Untitled: 12th Istanbul Biennial*, Istanbul (2011); *Simryn Gill: Inland*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne (2009); *Simryn Gill: Gathering*, MCA, Sydney (2008); *dOCUMENTA 12*, Kassel (2007). Gill is represented in the collections of, among others, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; M+, Hong Kong; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery, Singapore; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Collection, London; and a number of private collections.

Leah Gordon (born Ellesmere Port, UK) is an artist, curator, and writer. Her work explores the intersectional histories of the Caribbean plantation system, the Enclosure Acts, and the creation of the British working-class. Gordon's work amplifies 'histories from below' and recognises the role of carnival, folk traditions, grassroots religion in both performing and sustaining radical histories. Gordon's film and photographic work has been exhibited internationally including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; the Dak'art Biennale and the National Portrait Gallery, UK. She is the co-director of the Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; was co-curator of 'Kafou: Haiti, History & Art' at Nottingham Contemporary, UK; and 'PÒTOPRENS: The Urban Artists of Port-au-Prince' at Pioneer Works, NYC. Her book *KANAVAL* was published in 2021 and in 2022, her award-winning feature documentary *Kanaval: A People's History of Haiti*, was screened in cinemas and on BBC 4's Arena. In 2022, Gordon exhibited in and curated at documenta fifteen, Kassel; her work showed at MOCA North Miami and Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany. In 2023 Gordon's works were acquired by the Kadist Collection and

the Royal Museums Greenwich, and in 2024 she had works in group shows at Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam, UMOCA, Salt Lake City and Musée du quai Branly, Paris. In 2025 Gordon is exhibiting her new work, *Monument to the Vanquished Peasant*, at the Herbert Museum as part of the Coventry Biennial, and publishing an accompanying book, *Common People*, co-authored with Stephen Ellcock.

Roberto Juarez is a visual artist active in the areas of painting, printmaking, drawing and large scale public commissions. Born in Chicago of Puerto Rican and Mexican parents, he received artistic training at the San Francisco Art Institute followed by film studies at UCLA. He has had numerous solo and group shows at museums and galleries in the United States, Latin America, Europe and China.

During the 1980's, Juarez' paintings were shown in a group exhibition at Annina Nosei's gallery and during a series of one man shows at the Robert Miller Gallery. While Juarez was showing uptown, he was an artist living and working in the East Village. During this time, Juarez created a series of work dealing with his identity as a person of color, his Puerto Rican & Mexican heritage and sexuality as a gay man. Along with the subject matter, these works encompass Juarez' directness of line, virtuosic use of color and free floating imagery that has remained constant throughout his career.

Exhibitions during this period included Diego Cortez' (1981) *New Wave, New York* at PS1, Kynaston McShine's (1984) I*nternational Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture at MOMA*, Corcoron Gallery's (1987) traveling exhibition of *Hispanic Art in the United States; Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors* and the *Whitney Biennial (1987)*.

In the 90's, Juarez split his time between New York City and South Beach, Miami. He began to incorporate peat moss, rice paper and other natural materials in his canvases. His works combined nature based imagery with abstraction and contrasting textures while continuing his intuitive mark marking and use of color. With a return to New York in 2000, his imagery turned more abstract, typically featuring geometric forms and nature based systems.

In 2018, Edward J Sullivan curated *Roberto Juarez Processing: Paintings & Prints 2008 – 2018* at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art which presented Juarez as a dramatic interpreter of natural phenomena and abstract form. Juarez has continually moved between painting to printmaking to public projects having collaborated with the Tamarind Institute, Shark's Ink and Pace Prints while realizing commissions for Grand Central Terminal (1997), the GSA Federal Courthouse in Fort Pierce, Florida (2011) and Miami's International Airport (2011).

His work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kemper Museum of Art, Pérez Art Museum and Whitney Museum. Juarez earned the Prix de Rome (1997), a Guggenheim Fellowship (2002), entry into the National Academy of Design (2012) and a Civitella Raineri Residency (2021).

James López is Professor of Spanish at the University of Tampa, where he founded and co-directs the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate. The CJMSA's dedication to the study and teaching of the history of the Cuban émigré communities of the 19th and early-20th century has been recognized with two major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Florida Humanities Council. Prof. López is also a published scholar of Latin American literature, as well as literary translation.

Jerry Philogene is an Associate Professor and Director of the Black Studies Program at Middlebury College. Professor Philogene specializes in interdisciplinary American cultural history, art history, and visual arts of the Caribbean and the African diaspora with an emphasis on the Francophone Caribbean. Her publications have appeared in edited collections, peer-reviewed journals and exhibition catalogues.

Dr. Philogene is also an independent curator. In 2023, she co-organized with Dr. Katherine Smith *Myrlande Constant: The Work of Radiance*, an

exhibition and accompanying catalogue on the contemporary textile works of Haitian artist Myrlande Constant at the Fowler Museum, UCLA, 2023. Dr. Philogene is the recipient of a 2020 Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for her current book manuscript *The Socially Dead and Improbable Citizen: Visualizing Haitian Humanity and Visual Aesthetics*. She is also writing a monograph on Haitian modernist painter, Luce Turnier.

Maggie Steber is a documentary photographer who has worked in 70 countries on stories concerning the human experience. Her honors include a Pulitzer Prize finalist for 2019, Guggenheim Foundation Fellow for 2017-2018, the Leica Medal of Excellence, a Lucie Award in 2019, Overseas Press Club President's Award 2019, World Press Photo First Prize in Spot News, Medal of Honor for Distinguished Service to Journalism from the University of Missouri, the Alicia Patterson Grant, the Ernst Haas Grant, and a Knight Foundation grant for the New American Newspaper project, a visually-driven tabloid researched and conceived by Steber. In 2015, Steber was named as one of 11 Women of Vision by *National Geographic Magazine*. She served as Director of Photography at *The Miami Herald* from 1999 to 2003 where the photo staff won a Pulitzer Prize and were twice finalists. She was a Newsweek Contract Photographer. Her photographs are included in the Library of Congress, the Guggenheim Foundation Collection, the Richter Collection, and many private collections. Steber works for various publications, among them *National Geographic Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

Claire Tancons is a curator and scholar invested in the discourse and practice of the postcolonial politics of production and exhibition. For the last decade, Tancons has charted a distinct curatorial and scholarly path in performance, inflecting global art historical genealogies with African diasporic aesthetics as well as decentring and othering curatorial methodologies as part of a wider reflection on global conditions of cultural production. Tancons was recently a curator for Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber (with Zoe

Butt and Omar Kholeif), which opened in March 2019. Over the last decade, she has curated for established and emerging international biennials such as the Göteborg Biennial (2013), Biennale Bénin (2012), Cape Town Biennial (2009), Prospect.1 New Orleans (2008) and Gwangju Biennale (2008). As a curator of performance, Tancons organised the first solo New York exhibitions of artists Robin Rhode and Ralph Lemon at Artists Space (2004) and the Kitchen (2007). As the artistic director of large-scale public performances since 2008, Tancons has collaborated with artists/directors Delaney Martin and Mohamed Bourouissa, musicians Christophe Chassol and Arto Lindsay and architect Gia Wolff. Over the last decade, the processional performances that have become a hallmark of her practice have transformed such iconic public spaces as diverse as Gwangju's May 18 Democratic Square, Cape Town's Company Gardens, Göteborg's Götaplatsen and Miami Beach's Collins Avenue, Venice's streets and squares and New Orleans's backstreets as well as Tate Modern's Turbine Hall into sites of participatory experiments and civic interventions.

For more about Tancons, visit https://www.clairetancons.com.

William Vázquez a Nuyorican photographer and filmmaker, has over 30 years of experience influenced by humans, nature, and movement. His work spans fine arts, advertising, commercial spaces, and international NGOs. Vázquez has created campaigns for Fortune 100 companies, magazine features, and organizations aiding conflict zones. His assignments take him worldwide, regardless of resource limits or weather. He documents life's beauty and challenges, from maternal health in Sierra Leone to textile culture in Bolivia. His work has been published in many books and in magazines. He was a faculty member at the Master's Program at the School of Visual Arts in NYC, President of the New York chapter of the APA Advertising Photographers of America, a national organization, a regular speaker at Apple Store Events about photography and technology, as well as a certified FAA license mechanic. When he is not traveling the world, you may find him in Brooklyn, NY or Austin, TX. Currently, Vázquez is focusing on multimedia projects that highlight cultural visibility and personal, familial archives.

Lesley A. Wolff is Assistant Professor of Art and Design, specializing in global modern and contemporary Art History and Museum Studies, at the University of Tampa. Wolff's scholarship engages the intersections of heritage and foodways in 20th and 21st century Mexico, the Caribbean, and the US. She is author of the award-winning book *Culinary Palettes: The Visuality of Food in Postrevolutionary Mexican Art* (University of Texas Press, 2025) and co-editor of the volume *Nourish and Resist: Food and Feminisms in Contemporary Global Caribbean Art* (Yale University Press, 2024) as well as the special journal issue of *Arts* dedicated to "Rethinking Contemporary Latin American Art" (2023). Her work has appeared in numerous international publications including *Gender & History*, *Humanities*, *African and Black Diaspora*, and *Food, Culture & Society*. Wolff is also an active curator committed to revisionist art histories of the Americas. In addition to *The Kingdom of This World, Reimagined* (2019-2024), her exhibitions include *Raíces/ Roots: Camilo Loaiza Bonilla* (2025); *Layered Voices: Process and Paper in Contemporary Native American Art* (2020); *Decolonizing Refinement: Contemporary Pursuits in the Art of Edouard Duval-Carrié* (2018-2019); and *As Cosmopolitans and Strangers: Mexican Art of the Jewish Diaspora* (2014).

Acknowledgements

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Postscript

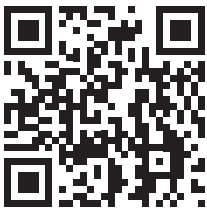
The Haitian Revolution presses upon us the world-building power of collective action, mutual care, and solidarity. In keeping with this enduring pursuit of peace and liberty, we invite readers to learn more about the following organizations that work to amplify Haitian voices both on the island and throughout the diaspora.

Le Centre d'art
(established 1944)
58 rue Roy, Port au Prince, Haiti

Learn more at *Lecentredart.org*

The Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance
(established 1994)
225 Northeast 59th Street, Miami, Florida, United States

Learn more at *Haitianculturalartsalliance.org*

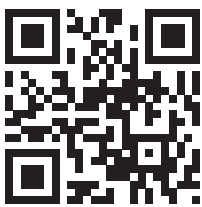


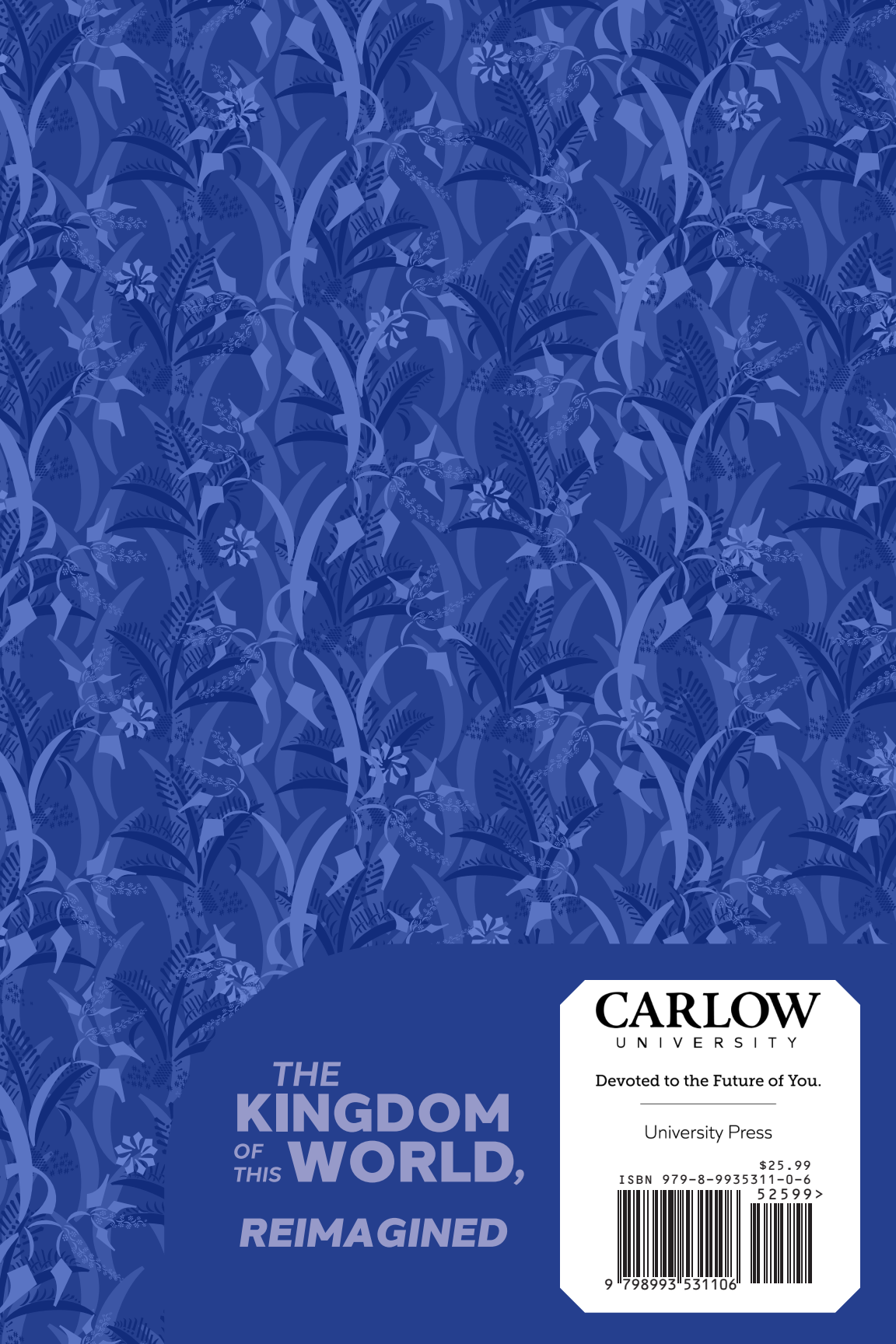
Haiti Cultural Exchange
(established 2009)
35 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, United States

Learn more at *Haiticulturalx.org*

Haitian Studies Association
(established 1987)

Learn more at *Haitianstudies.org*





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